THE SPINNER OF THE YEARS

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

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THE SPINNER OF THE YEARS

By

PHYLLIS E. BENTLEY

INHERITANCE

CARR

A MODERN TRAGEDY

THE SPINNER OF THE YEARS

THE SPINNER OF THE YEARS

BY

PHYLLIS E. BENTLEY

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMXXXIV

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Printed in the United States of America.
Set up and electrotyped. Reissued, July, 1934.

"The Spinner of the Years" was published originally in the United States in 1929 before "Inheritance" and "The Modern Tragedy" had given to Miss Bentley the large public which she now enjoys. As "The Spinner of the Years" has been out of print of recent years, it has been reissued at the request of many who, through admiration of Miss Bentley's later work, wish to acquaint themselves with her earlier work as well.

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BOOK I

JOHNNIE

THE SPINNER OF THE YEARS

I

The Armitages were at dinner. Outside the windows a dank autumnal fog, which had clung heavily to the landscape all day, was dissolving itself in thick sooty rain; but within the room there was warmth, ease, and the civilised amenities: a hot north-country fire glowed redly in the grate, and the polished table reflected gleaming glass and silver and curled yellow chrysanthemums and the clear vertical flames of the candles by whose light Mrs. Armitage liked to dine. The widowed Mrs. Armitage, sitting very erect and looking aristocratic and impressive in a black gown and pearls, her fine profile and excellent figure only slightly blurred by time and the cares of this world, her wavy hair beautifully silvered by the same causes, narrated, in her drawling and languid but not unmusical tones, the details of the afternoon's bridge drive, from which she had returned with a valuable prize. Her two children listened in silence; from time to time, as Mrs. Armitage described some particularly successful finesse, Imogen, who had been present at the affair, smiled across the table to her brother in tentative appreciation, but she elicited no response; it was obvious that Luke was in one of his morose economical fits.

Luke, who was in the early twenties, had his mother's clear skin and fine grey eyes, but in other respects did not resemble her at all. His hair was straight and of an undistinguished light brown, the dingy remains of a youthful auburn from

which much had been prophesied. In figure he was square and solid, with shoulders disproportionately broad for his height; his face, too, was broad and heavy, with a rather thick underlip and a powerful jaw. This lower part of his face was redeemed, for those who knew him, by his candid eyes and wide forehead, which somehow proclaimed an honest, if stubborn, intelligence, blunt and slow, in the English fashion, rather than subtle and swift, but impartial and independent in its workings. Luke had lately taken to wearing rimless eyeglasses, attached by a thin gold chain to a hook behind his ear, and neither these eyeglasses nor his thick straight hair nowadays ever strayed from position. Imogen had known days when it was otherwise, and Luke's untidiness of person had been her mother's constant theme; but since Luke had begun to work for his medical degree at Leeds his dishevelment had miraculously ceased, and he had become a perfectly correct and dependable escort in society for his widowed mother and his sister. Luke had, too, a pretty humour of his own, and was wont to enliven the family's evenings by a satiric commentary on his day's doings in his university. But to-night he was sullen and disapproving, and wore a heavy scowl. For a long time he had been liable to sudden moods of criticism of his mother's mode of expenditure, and since his majority these moods, which Imogen dreaded above all things, seemed always to hover just round the corner waiting for some chance word to call them out in all their blackness.

Mrs. Armitage was the widow of a well-known Hudley solicitor who had always moved in the best Hudleian society. Richard Armitage had died abruptly when Luke was eight and Imogen four years old, and the initiated said that his affairs—and those of his clients—were in a devil of a mess, and that it was hard luck on his partner; goodness knew, in any case, what his widow and those two children would do.

Mr. Armitage's partner had managed, after a lengthy struggle, to disentangle the affairs and carry on the practice; but whereas Mr. Armitage's partner lived in a smallish house in a row, and moved in a very mediocre society, Mrs. Armitage retained her comfortable semi-detached residence in the select Askroyd neighbourhood; and though she often complained with bitterness that she was poor, and was always fretfully conscious that other people's purses were longer than her own, she kept an experienced maid, and dressed and entertained with distinction if not with abundance, while flowers, chocolates, excursions to Bradford, music lessons, and other such luxuries always seemed to be on hand when they were required. Imogen had been to a good boarding school and had just returned from a year in Paris; Luke had attended a day school in Hudley and had now passed on to Leeds for his long medical training. From time to time queries arose in Hudleian circles as to how Mrs. Armitage managed to pay for all this out of the very scanty substance which her husband had left her. As she was not a native of the West Riding her affairs were not thoroughly known, and it was possible that she had money of her own or received an allowance from her relatives; but the initiated again spoke of debts and long-unpaid bills, and hinted that her bridge winnings must amount to a considerable sum yearly. Of all this, of course, Imogen knew nothing; she knew only that sometimes, quite unaccountably, money was scarce and her mother querulous, and that at other times, when all seemed well, some little detail of extravagant expenditure would send Luke off into one of his dreaded moods. His face would grow dark and stubborn, and he would reply with curt literalness to anything she ventured to say to him, while Mrs. Armitage, averting her face from her son, would talk on and on in veiled sarcasms about the ingratitude of children, her voice getting higher and more peevish with each sentence, until finally she broke

out into a direct indictment of Luke's rude, stupid, loutish, and altogether unfilial behaviour to his widowed mother. At this point she frequently produced a hem-stitched handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes; and Imogen, torn between her allegiance to her mother and her loyalty to her well-loved Luke, would earnestly attempt to reconcile the combatants, weeping and assuring Mrs. Armitage that she was certain Luke did not mean anything unkind. The sight of her tears usually brought a prompt conclusion to the storm; Mrs. Armitage then rebuked her daughter, in tones of calm affection, for being such a silly girl and taking things so seriously; while Luke hastily switched on the wireless or suggested a visit to the pictures or some game or other to keep the quarrel in abeyance. Later, however, when Imogen had been despatched to bed and Luke was supposed to be working, the contest would be resumed, and harsh things would be said on both sides. Mrs. Armitage could be emphatic enough when she chose, for in spite of her affectation of languor she was the reverse of weak, and her sarcasms were always well-directed and clever; while Luke always tackled any question which needed to be tackled in a blunt, dogged way which his mother found excessively tiresome. It was becoming more and more difficult to evade his enquiries by simply pointing out that she was his mother and the head of the household, and that the conduct of the Armitage affairs lay therefore entirely in her hands. Sometimes Imogen would overhear these altercations from her bedroom on the floor above; then for a day or two she would be quiet and subdued and wear a sad little look, for which Mrs. Armitage and Luke each blamed the other, thus adding a double portion to their growing mutual rancour. Mrs. Armitage never gave way to her son on the point at issue; but it was noticeable that after each of their dissensions she introduced a host of small and irritating economies into the household—eagerly seconded by Imogen, who was still

young and ingenuous enough to be able to believe that while her mother could not, of course, be wrong, Luke was most probably right. Unfortunately, these economies almost always proved ephemeral, neither forward nor lasting; their chief use was the verbal one of strengthening Mrs. Armitage's defence the next time her son chose to criticise her.

The detail which had brought on Luke's present black mood concerned Imogen's new photographs, the proofs of which lay on the table beside him. These photographs had already cost the price of a day spent in Leeds, where lay the photographic establishment Mrs. Armitage patronised. Railway fares, taxis, luncheons, and the important trifles of fashionable wear which Mrs. Armitage always secured when she visited towns larger than her own, had added considerably to the already stiff price of the photographs—in themselves, according to Luke, a useless luxury; and now to-night Mrs. Armitage, dissatisfied with the proofs which had arrived that afternoon, had proposed that the outing to Leeds should be repeated. She had offered the offending proofs for Luke's inspection, but with a steady look at her he had laid them unopened by his plate, and Mrs. Armitage, apparently unmoved, had launched out into her lengthy description of the bridge drive.

"So, of course, that put me a long way ahead of all the others," she concluded in her high, emphatic drawl. "The prizes were really *beautiful*—all cut glass, even the consolation prize. Mrs. Thornton got that; she simply hasn't a notion how to play, poor thing! She really ought to take lessons—I'm sure I don't know why she doesn't, for they've money for anything. I saw you playing with her later, Imogen; she stayed at the same table the whole afternoon. If you're not going to look at those photographs, Luke," she added with a touch of asperity, "please let me have them again."

"I'd rather look at Imogen," said Luke, smiling at his sister, as he pushed the packet back along the table.

"I think you did splendidly, Mother," said Imogen loyally, a little behind in the conversation, as was often the case with her, for she was inclined to be absent and dreamy.

Turning a little sideways from the table Mrs. Armitage put up her lorgnette and surveyed the photographs. "The head is very good in this one," she began, "but I prefer you in evening dress, Imogen, and then the arm isn't graceful. Now in the other one the pose and dress are excellent, but I don't care for the expression—you look as though you hadn't had anything to eat for a month, dear," she explained, turning to her daughter with a smile. "You really *must* try to remember not to put on that far-away expression of yours, Imogen; a girl should always make the best of herself, you know." She turned again to the photographs, and, in spite of her annoyance with Luke, a smile of pleasure crept over her worldly face. "One would think you took no interest in your sister, Luke," she murmured in soft but deliberate tones, knowing quite well that Imogen was Luke's darling and jewel, just as she was Mrs. Armitage's, though their views of their respective duties towards their jewel were as wide asunder as the poles.

Thus adroitly flicked, Luke assumed a mien of jocose pomposity which his mother particularly disliked, held out a hand, and began: "Well, well, let us see"—he nearly said "these masterpieces," but refrained for fear of hurting Imogen's feelings—"this famous far-away portrait," he substituted, with a smile.

"They're worth looking at, you'll find," said his mother with calm pride, handing him one or two.

They were indeed worth looking at. The photographer was evidently one who took his *métier* seriously, and he had faithfully reproduced, not only Imogen's obvious beauties—her waving black hair, done in smooth lustrous rings about her ears, the pure pale oval of her face, her large dark eyes,

her arched brows and long dark eyelashes, the lovely youthful curves of her slim body, her graceful arms, the flowerlike poise of her head—but also that more subtle beauty for which Luke particularly loved her: the ingenuous truth and purity which looked out of every line of her girlish face. The famous "far-away" portrait represented Imogen gazing slightly upwards, with an eager yet wistful expectancy; she looked as though she were longing to begin some magnificent and arduous task, something particularly noble for the commencement of which the trumpets no doubt soon would blare, but lacking which life seemed at present strangely restless and unsatisfying. To a thoughtful fancy the portrait might have stood as a symbolical representation of youth on the threshold of life. Luke was perhaps hardly old enough to see it quite like that, but he was moved by the hint of pathos in his sister's pictured beauty. His conception of his duty to Imogen, however, required him never to cease from curbing his mother's expenditure on what he considered unnecessary luxuries, so his only comment was: "The photographs are certainly good; but why have them at all, when we have Imogen herself to look at?"

In spite of himself his voice lacked conviction; he could not help feeling that the portraits were too fine to be wasted.

"My dear boy," said his mother with languid condescension, "*all* girls have them. It's the customary thing. Allow me to know what is proper for Imogen and what is not."

Luke snorted, unimpressed. Whenever his mother spoke of "all" girls he was conscious of some undefined danger ahead for Imogen, for he was certain that Mrs. Armitage's view of the whole duty of woman differed *in toto* from his own.

"If you must have photographs of Imogen," he said, yielding that point, "why not be satisfied with these? Surely they're good enough. I can't imagine anything better."

"What a legal mind you have, Luke!" drawled his mother

with a rather acid smile. "The defence is that my client had no photographs at all, or if he had, then they were bad ones. I suppose it's logical, but I don't pretend to follow it."

Luke laughed shortly. "No one would make a better barrister than you, Mother," he said, with an intonation not altogether complimentary. Unable to let well alone, he added: "However, my legal mind, as you call it, will come in useful in forensic medicine—if I ever have to give evidence in a murder case, you know, or a divorce."

"Luke!" exclaimed his mother in disgust. "How can you!" She gave a quick glance at Imogen to see if she had heard this unpleasant suggestion, but the girl was lost in a reverie, her dark eyes large and fixed, her white arms hanging limply beside her drooping body, her breast rising and falling slowly under the spell of some youthful dream of enchanted forests and romantic quests.

"If you've finished, Luke," resumed Mrs. Armitage with her air of well-bred martyrdom, "perhaps you'll kindly ring the bell. We've been so long that the pudding will be simply ruined."

Luke obeyed. There was a considerable pause, during which sounds could be heard as of someone going along the hall to the front entrance.

"Surely she can't have mistaken the bell!" murmured Mrs. Armitage with impatience. "It's too absurd. Well, Jennifer!" she exclaimed reproachfully, when at last her elderly maid appeared at the dining-room door.

The thin, prim, highly correct Jennifer had been with Mrs. Armitage continuously for more than twenty years, the solitary break being the two months of her own disastrous wedlock—disastrous because at the end of that time she had discovered that her husband already had a wife. In spite of his urgent entreaties and protestations of undying faith, she had declined to remain with him, and had returned to the

service of the Armitages, lavishing on Imogen, who was then a baby, the affection she had hoped to give to a child of her own. Not unnaturally the episode had soured her, and she was apt to take a far from lenient view of all youthful peccadilloes. She explained now, with her usual austere precision, that the front-door bell had sounded at the same time as the one from the dining-room, and that a gentleman wanted to see Mr. Luke.

"Who is it?" demanded Luke, rising.

"He wouldn't give his name, sir," replied Jennifer. Her severe features relaxed and her small hard eyes took on a shade of amused benevolence as she said this.

"How tiresome!" said Mrs. Armitage fretfully. "In the middle of dinner! Don't be long, Luke; we'll wait for you. I'll ring when we're ready, Jennifer."

Jennifer silently acquiesced and retired. Luke followed, and the door was closed.

For a few minutes there was silence between mother and daughter. The candles flickered in the draught caused by the opening and closing of the door, and then settled down into immobility again; the clock ticked, Imogen gazed into the fire, and Mrs. Armitage compared the pictures of her daughter with the living reality.

"You might have one taken in that frock you're wearing, Imogen," she suggested presently with approval. "It's old, of course, but that yellow and black suits you." Some slight change in her daughter's expression caused her to add in her convincing drawl: "The photographs will be splendid for Christmas presents, you know."

Imogen's face cleared, and she sank back into her reverie, appeased. In her own trifling personal expenses Imogen practised a scrupulous economy, partly because she wished to consider Luke's feelings even if they were erroneous ones, partly because of a deeper conviction that Imogen Mary

Armitage was not really important enough to be entitled to that best of everything on a large scale which her mother seemed to desire for her. Her delicacy shrank, however, from imposing this private standard of her own as a criterion for Mrs. Armitage's behaviour. Imogen wished above all things to do right, but questions of money had always been assumed, both by her mother and by Luke, to be so entirely out of her province that she felt she had no grasp of them—besides, it all seemed so small and odious a question to make such a fuss about. Luke seemed to think that they were poor; Mrs. Armitage seemed to think that they were not. Imogen wished earnestly that they would settle the point and pass on to something more important. Just at present her life seemed strangely lacking in things that were important. Not that she was unhappy, of course; oh no! There was Luke—in the evenings and at the week-ends, when Luke was in the house, life seemed much fuller and more purposeful; she seemed, in fact, to be living then instead of just waiting to be alive. But Luke was away all day five days out of the seven, and had to work very hard even when he was at home; she did not get much of Luke. There were also her domestic duties to fill up her time—though Jennifer and Mrs. Armitage did not allot her many of these. Then there was her music, and also her singing, the activity known as keeping up her French, and that great delight, her reading; but somehow none of these things seemed of quite the same paramount importance as they had at school—there seemed no object in them, no point; they were arrows shot in the darkness at an unknown mark. At school Imogen had sung, with thrilling conviction, of "fights for the fearless, goals for the eager," which were to present themselves for conquest and attainment immediately upon one's entry into the larger non-scholastic world, but somehow such important and thrilling crises seemed to be a

long time coming her way. She waited for them without discontent, but with a burning eagerness of hope; she had read somewhere that youth was a blank page on which life wrote, and she longed with all her heart for the moment when strange romantic characters should appear mysteriously on her page.

A coal in the fire suddenly settled itself deeper in its glowing bed; Imogen started and looked about her, and reflected that Luke was a very long time away.

"Who can it be, Mother?" she inquired in her clear soft tones. "Luke's mysterious visitor, I mean?"

Mrs. Armitage threw off a few languid conjectures as to his identity. Privately she was rather nervous and dreaded some disaster, or at least some awkward monetary fix, from this curiously timed call; at the best it was probably a tiresome person begging for a local charity, and this possibility she suggested to her daughter. Imogen sighed; though she did not know it she had been wishing that it might be someone, someone—she did not quite know who, but someone really interesting, someone who would inscribe a name on that blank page of hers.

At this moment Luke opened the door and stood there with his hand on the knob; he smiled rather strangely and said nothing.

"*What* is it, Luke?" demanded Mrs. Armitage, a despairing energy in her tone. From his behaviour she feared the worst; and she was already summoning her courage and her wits to meet all the financial contretemps she could think of as likely to occur. To do her justice, these were not many, for what Luke called her extravagance was not in any way unbounded, but kept within the limits of a definite plan; nevertheless, the legend of her unpaid bills was sufficiently well-founded to be a source of uneasiness to her. "What is

it?" she repeated, half rising as she remembered that at all costs Imogen must be kept out of it, whatever it might prove to be.

Luke said curtly: "It's Johnnie."

"Never!" cried Mrs. Armitage enthusiastically, because of the ecstasy of her relief. "How delightful for you, Luke! What is he doing in this part of the world? Has he had any dinner? Do bring him in, my dear boy, and don't stand there looking at us like that—you quite alarmed me. Imogen, ring the bell for Jennifer. I thought she looked rather strange when she said he wouldn't give his name. A joke, I suppose."

That Jennifer had consented to lend herself to a joke was accounted for by its being Johnnie's joke, for he had always been a favourite of hers ever since their first meeting, when he told her that her name belonged to his county—you often saw it on Cornish gravestones, he explained seriously. Jennifer was a Yorkshirewoman born and bred, but this hint of something romantic and strange about her name seemed to please her; she often referred to it, and had been fond of discussing explanations of it with Imogen when she dressed her or brushed her hair, for in the days when Johnnie was in Hudley Imogen had been young enough to require a nurse. Jennifer's partiality for Johnnie did not preclude criticism; on the contrary, she was often most provokingly severe on his childish faults, and told tales of him to Mrs. Armitage in a way which excited Luke's lasting wrath. It was well understood at Royd Bank, however, as Mrs. Armitage's house was called, that in this case Jennifer loved where she chastened, and Johnnie would receive a sharp word and a newly baked delicacy where Luke would get neither.

Johnnie Talland was the only child of parents who were both natives of Cornwall. The Reverend Francis Talland had been the incumbent of St. Mark's, a poor parish in the

industrial depths of Hudley, for eight years; Johnnie was seven years old or so when he first came to the West Riding. The Reverend Francis was a tall, thin, greying, rather slow and melancholy man, with an ascetic face, a long beard, a very kindly smile, and High-Church tendencies; to the youthful Imogen he looked like the pictures of the patriarchs in her illustrated story of the Bible, and when anyone spoke of Abraham or Noah she always visualised him. He was a great geologist, too, which in Imogen's eyes—though probably not in other people's—completed the resemblance; his study was lined with works on millstone grit and Yorkshire lias (whatever that might be), and he had quantities of big flat books, curiously named atlases, though there were no maps in them, but instead thrilling pictures of carboniferous and other strata, coloured red and black and grey. Mrs. Talland was short and thin, with the remains of beauty on her sweet, rather faded face; she had a twinkle in her eye, a soft thin voice, dowdy clothes, and a high spirit; it was understood that she came of a good county family. The living of St. Mark's was not a rich one, the calls on the Talland's charity were endless, and economies were very necessary; but the weight of the economies never fell on Johnnie, who was the child of his parents' old age and correspondingly dear. Johnnie and Luke had met, both new boys, on the first day of term at school; and instantly, for no particular reason, they became firm friends. Their friendship was famous at school; everyone knew of it, though on what it was founded nobody could ever tell, for in temperament the two boys differed widely. The brilliant Johnnie was dark and handsome, quick, clever, lively, impulsive, dashing, full of wit and originality and rather fickle; he was always at the top of his class, and played all games with a beautiful verve and style though with less staying-power than the solid Luke; he was hot and daring in strife, and—in his schooldays at

least—never knew defeat; altogether wherever he went everybody noticed him. When Imogen thought of Johnnie, she always saw him striding with a gallant air towards the school platform to receive a prize; she had witnessed that scene so often, sitting beside Mrs. Armitage in the school gallery, that it meant Johnnie to her. Now Luke, to Mrs. Armitage's disgust, though he worked more steadily than Johnnie, never won prizes or did anything brilliant; he circled comfortably about the middle place in his class and was not envious of his friend's eminence. Whatever pickle Johnnie was in he always looked a fine gentlemanly lad, whereas Luke only too often appeared rough and unmannerly; and his emotions were sluggish, miles behind Johnnie's quick and generous response to external stimuli. Indeed, Mrs. Armitage held Johnnie up for Luke's emulation so much and so often that it was a wonder Luke's loyalty survived it. It did survive, however—Mrs. Talland was very fond of Luke—and the two boys went through every stage together. They swam together, bicycled together, skated and sledged together, became naturalists together, dropped that and became antiquarians together—or, rather, Johnnie led the way to these things and Luke followed after consideration, Imogen, who was always counted as part of Luke, docilely bringing up the rear. There was, however, a stubborn independence, an obstinate integrity of character about Luke which entirely forbade anyone to regard him as Johnnie's inferior—Johnnie himself always professed to be maddened by Luke's slowness of comprehension, but in reality he had boundless faith in him. Their enforced parting had been a great trouble to both boys. Six or seven years ago Mrs. Talland's chest, always weak, grew suddenly so much weaker that sojourn in a warmer climate became imperative. Mr. Talland managed to get appointed to a living in his native county, and the three had gone out of the Armitages' world

to Cornwall. At first Johnnie and Luke had corresponded with fervour, but gradually Johnnie's letters became fewer and shorter and more reticent. Then suddenly, when nobody was looking, in a night, as it were, Luke's hair faded, and he grew up from a rough though likeable hobbledehoy into a calm, self-possessed, and astonishingly capable young man; he developed a taste for music and announced to his mother his wish to become a doctor. Mrs. Armitage at once agreed, though how, as she said with languid exaggeration to her friends, she was to obtain a practice for him she hadn't the slightest notion. By dint of saying this to the right people she obtained an excellent notion, and Luke's medical studies began. New interests arose, and the name of Johnnie gradually dropped out of the Armitage conversation, except at Christmas-time and at his birthday in the early summer, when substantial and attractive presents were regularly despatched to him.

And now here he was again, appearing in the flesh behind Luke's shoulder. Imogen, her reverie forgotten, wondered intensely what he would be like. Would he be the same old Johnnie, a member of the family, a person with whom one did not feel the slightest awkwardness, with whom, indeed, one did not remember one had feelings at all, but simply enjoyed what was going on? (Wherever Johnnie was, innumerable exciting things always went on.) Or would he be quite different, much older, a stranger? Imogen, having rung for Jennifer, stood by the hearth, her lips parted in an eager smile of welcome, and fixed her bright soft gaze on Johnnie as he came forward and shook Mrs. Armitage's cordial hand.

Her first impression was one of joyous relief—Johnnie had remained exactly the same, except that he was perhaps better-looking than ever. He was dark and slim and tall, his thin face pale but animated, just as it had always been; his dark

hair smooth and correct—from his earliest youth Johnnie had had a kind of instinct for social correctness. His smile was just as joyous as ever, and his voice had the old pleasing ring. But on the heels of this relief came a strange abrupt sensation which seemed to clutch at Imogen's heart and dim the brightness of her smile—the entirely opposite impression that on the contrary Johnnie was essentially different, and that in some incomprehensible way the change was deeply painful and pathetic. This pang of sympathetic pain was partly relieved by Johnnie's saying to Mrs. Armitage that he had arrived in Hudley only fifteen minutes ago, by a very fog-belated train—his appearance of fatigue was therefore, perhaps, temporary and natural. "I came along at once to see Luke," he added eagerly, and the girl's impression of change and pathos was renewed, for in the old days Johnnie had never sought Luke; the seeking had been all on the other side.

"You know you are always welcome here, Johnnie," said Mrs. Armitage with stately emphasis. "I'm delighted to see you."

"It's delightful to me to see you, I can assure you," returned Johnnie with one of his brilliant smiles. "You don't know how glad I am to be back in the smoky old West Riding again."

In this he spoke no more than the truth, for to Johnnie life had seemed to fade and go awry from the time he left Luke and Hudley behind him. To begin with, he had been obliged, of course, to go to a fresh school, a larger school, a school where he was regarded simply as a new boy and not as the brilliant Johnnie Talland. By some mischance his brilliance was not recognised at this new school at first. Now Johnnie never did anything by halves, and if he could not be acclaimed for brilliance and general excellence he felt a pressing need to be a marvel of incompetent stupidity—if he

could not do a thing well he had to show that he was unfitted by nature to do it at all. If he could not be admired, he must horrify, and he proceeded on these lines for quite a while. Presently his real ability was recognised, and a little judicious praise brought him into line again and revived his natural ambitions, but this year or so of perversity probably cost him his chance of a scholarship. Instead of going to Oxford, therefore, which was the goal of his hopes, he went to London, prepared to resent all the time the fact that it was not the older university. However, his ability saved him; he became again the brilliant Talland, and ran pretty straight—Johnnie could always run magnificently straight, so long as there was someone to provide him with ballast in the shape of admiration. In the good old Hudley days Luke had always been at hand to provide the ballast, and it was astonishing how much one missed him. In London Johnnie acquired some very decent friends, but unfortunately he also acquired the taste for pleasure. The pleasure was quite innocent: it consisted of seeing the best plays, the best operas, the best paintings, reading the best books, hearing the best music, keeping up with all the new movements, eating meals in lighted restaurants where there was colour and noise, wandering about London and thrilling to its lights, its hum, its crowds, its cosmopolitan romance, its sunsets; and in general being sociable. There was nothing very wrong about all this, as Johnnie frequently assured himself, except that it cost rather more than one would have thought, though of course it was worth it—as Johnnie said enthusiastically, the culture, the sense of life and joy, the feeling of keeping abreast with all that was best in the age, was worth anything. Unfortunately, it sometimes had the effect of making one's own work seem rather dry and futile. After the glorious rioting poetry of "Hassan," for instance, which went to Johnnie's head like strong wine, it was difficult to turn with

zest to Anglo-Saxon strong verbs or the translation of Ronsard. At any rate, Johnnie found it difficult. He read a great deal and knew a great deal, and he was rather fond of throwing scorn on the narrow futility of examination questions, and somehow or other he did not take quite such a good degree as had been expected of him. Still, he had been fairly happy in London, and he was sorry when his three years there came to an end, and he had to return to the desolate Cornish vicarage and face the question of a career.

For the past few years the inhabitants of the Cornish vicarage had been getting less and less like those jolly, lovable, perfectly all right and splendid parents whom Johnnie had known in, say, the Hudley days. His mother was no longer a mother, but an invalid—a brave and gallant invalid, certainly, but still an invalid with sunken cheeks; she coughed incessantly, and her old blithe spirit seemed to struggle with painful physical compulsions. Her admiration, too, for Johnnie was nowadays slightly tempered by a loving criticism, and Johnnie was never at his best under criticism. Mr. Talland, too, seemed sunk in melancholy, out of which occasionally flashed a wild, fanatic gleam which alarmed Johnnie because he saw it alarmed his mother. Mr. Talland's church practices were already so "high" that they brought him into trouble with his bishop, and they grew daily higher and farther away from his wife's traditional sympathies. Moreover, his parishioners, who had not known him in his best days, did not greatly love him—not, that is, like the St. Mark's people, to whom the Talland family had been the brightest stars in the firmament. Johnnie had long ago declined to take Orders, and his father, remembering perhaps some youthful anguish of his own, did not press it, so Johnnie now set about finding some work to do as a schoolmaster. Somehow his qualifications did not seem as marketable as they had done before he acquired them, and there

was no rush to secure the services of the brilliant Johnnie Talland. He spent a wretched three of four months at home, bitterly ashamed of his idleness, and losing in morale and cheerfulness daily. Eventually he did secure quite a good little post as resident master at a preparatory school in a Midland village, and he set off there in high glee.

From the first things went rather badly in Loughmore, as the place was called. Johnnie was very young and very inexperienced; accustomed to being thought brilliant and popular, he had golden visions of being a brilliant and popular young master, such as he had himself often adored at school. Unfortunately for him the adoration of his pupils was already given to the owner of the school, who was an ex-captain, a thoroughly competent master, and an Oxford cricket blue; and they thought Johnnie conceited, ignorant, and easily irritated. He was too proud to own his lack of success with the boys to his colleagues, who therefore thought him a stiff young ass, much too good-looking for his own welfare. For the first time in his life Johnnie felt that he really was an unutterable failure—those old days of sulks at school were very different, for there he could retrieve his place at any moment, outdistancing all his competitors at one bound, while here there was no hope of his even drawing level with his colleagues; he should do well if he did not fall by the track. There was plenty of pride and some manhood, however, in Johnnie, and he fought his way along through the painful and bitter experience, saying nothing about it to anybody, least of all to Luke, whose letters were as full of admiring confidence as ever. Eventually Johnnie gained a certain measure of competence in his work; he was able to understand that the boys were just ordinary human boys, and his colleagues just ordinary human men—indeed, the latter seemed to him so ordinary that he fell into the opposite error and began to despise them. They, poor, sober,

conventional things, did not know a tithe as much about literature as Johnnie did; they did not understand art, and their taste in music was banal; their persons had not Johnnie's immaculacy, and their souls had no poetry in them. (Johnnie was by way of being a poet; indeed, at intervals he actually was one.) At first he had enjoyed feeling superior to his colleagues, after that painful interval of humiliation; he had wandered about in the pleasant undulating country and thought how much better able than they he was to appreciate the grassy slopes, the richly foliaged trees, the wide gentle streams, the flight of birds against the evening sky. But soon this rather solitary occupation of feeling superior failed him; he began to long for light and colour and movement and youthful joy; he wanted to talk, to laugh, to dance, to go to the theatre, to see pretty girls and rich fabrics, to dine in a brightly lighted restaurant, to feel cultured and modern and abreast of the times, as he had done in London. He felt instead that he was tied up for ever in a network of time-tables and marks and dull pedantic details, with all the jolly things of life put just out of his reach as unsuitable for one of his profession. At last he came to the point where his resistance broke; he went up to town for a bright, whirling week-end, and revelled in doing all the things which it was not correct for an instructor of youth to do. These things cost a good deal of money, and the return to Loughmore was appalling in its desolation. About this time there occurred his birthday, and a letter from Luke—steady old Luke—arrived, telling of examinations safely (not brilliantly) passed, and progress made on the road to being a doctor. In a burst of irritation Johnnie decided that he was not that steady kind of person—not Luke's kind of person—at all; he was a highly-strung, nervous, artistic kind of fellow; a hedonistic sort of man who enjoyed life intensely, tramped about and went through exciting, unconventional adven-

tures, and thought of mere ordinary doctors as Philistine bores. Johnnie was rather subject to these changes in his view of his rôle in life, and the result of this change was rather serious; for he fell into a course of conduct, with regard to a girl from the neighbouring village who acted as maid in the house, which at first made him feel picturesque and Byronic and romantically passionate, but later gave him hours of wild remorse when he gazed in horror at the appalling things the brilliant Johnnie Talland seemed to be doing. At these moments he would have given worlds to be safely back in Hudley, having tea and bread and jam with good old Luke and that nice little podge Imogen Mary. Towards the end of the term the sordid and feeble intrigue was accidentally discovered, and Johnnie left the school with an indelible scar on his good name, and with a conviction—among others even less pleasant—that the occupation of schoolmaster was no longer open to him.

He went home to Cornwall because it never occurred to him to do anything else—he was much more naïve than he imagined—and spent a few terrible, excruciating, agonising days during which he tried to screen the affair from his father and mother by invented explanations of his leaving the school thus early. Then one or two people in Loughmore village, hearing of the finality of his departure, sent in bills—somehow Johnnie always managed to get involved in bills—and Mr. Talland found out much and then more, until at last he knew, not quite the whole story, for Johnnie denied the crowning iniquity, but enough to lower his opinion of his son to a point unendurable by the sensitive lad. In an agony of shame Johnnie flung himself out of the house, and spent the night down by the sea, with the intention of drowning himself. He did actually advance up to his thighs in the long swirl of the cool night waves, and allowed himself to be sucked off the ledge of rock into the treacherous seaweed

deeps beneath, but he was immediately seized—like many would-be suicides of harder stuff than poor Johnnie—with an overpowering desire for life—life strong, full, glowing, and even yet full of hope. Perhaps it was the beauty of the summer sea beneath the high silver stars which made him feel that life too might yet be a thing of beauty, perhaps it was his skill in self-justification, or perhaps it was merely the ordinary self-preserving instinct; at any rate, after a tussle with the sharp Cornish rocks which left him bruised and scratched, he emerged from the sea with deep sobs tearing his throat, feeling a better and a wiser man. In future he would run magnificently straight—indeed, he might yet retrieve this early slip. It was not as if he had been the first to lead that girl astray. He would be good, he would be more than good, he would be fine and great, he decided, as he tramped back up the hill to the vicarage, where his parents kept vigil by the empty hearth, agonising over his continued absence. Somehow his good resolutions, which he made haste to impart to them, did not reassure them quite as much as he had hoped, but they were very kind to him.

Since then he had filled various small local jobs, had brought his ability faithfully to bear on them, and had achieved quite a local reputation for ingenuity and new ideas; but there were moments almost every night when his heart nearly broke to think that the brilliant Johnnie Talland had come down to affairs so lowly, in which there was such small hope of doing anything notable. He saw a desolate future before him, and became irritable in manner and careless and slovenly in his dress. His mother noted all these increasing griefs and sorrowed over them, and after careful thought urged her husband to write to some of his old friends in Hudley and try to obtain some work for Johnnie there.

"How can I recommend him for a position of trust?"

demanded Mr. Talland sternly; and it was some time before he could be persuaded to give his own son the second chance he would never have denied to another man's.

At length he wrote to the son of a late wealthy manufacturer who, living just outside Hudley, had been united with him in geological pursuits; and after some weeks he received a rather uneven letter in reply. The son was eager to acknowledge Mr. Talland's merits, but not so eager as to Johnnie's; in a large sprawling hand and an incoherent style he dwelt upon the bad state of trade and the impossibility of finding jobs for even the most experienced men, and ended by saying that if Johnnie cared to take on the foreign correspondence for a certain Denbridge firm he mentioned, he had better come north on Saturday, so as to begin work next week; his mother, who sent her very kindest remembrances to her late husband's old friend, had already found for Johnnie some suitable lodgings with a most motherly woman, who could be relied upon to air his sheets and give him nourishing food. The north-country brusquerie of this letter sent a warm glow of hope to the hearts of the desponding Talland pair, and when the plan was tactfully communicated to Johnnie by his mother he embraced it with eager and joyous enthusiasm. He wished for nothing better than to return to dear old Hudley, where he had always been so happy, and to good old Luke, his staunch and loyal friend. Luke, he felt instinctively, would keep him straight if nobody else could. To Luke he would still be the brilliant Johnnie Talland, for Luke knew of nothing to tarnish that brilliance, and should never know. Oh, it would be splendid, splendid! And who knew what opportunities of advancement might not present themselves in that Denbridge firm? Of course, the job was only a poor and unimportant one for a man with his qualifications—Johnnie had no illusions about that—but it might lead to almost anything. A new life was beginning.

He set off for his long journey northward in an ecstasy of enthusiasm. At their parting his mother gave him her blessing, and laid great stress on his seeking out the Armitages at once. "I'll go to-night," cried Johnnie, and his eyes lighted with pleasure at the thought that he would positively see Luke that very day. Mrs. Talland hinted also that gratitude was due to young Mr. Thornton for this chance of rehabilitation. "Oh, of course," said Johnnie rather impatiently, thinking of Luke and crabbed old Jennifer and little Imogen, and of Mrs Armitage, a rather worldly person with whom one had to walk carefully, but one who had always admired the brilliant Johnnie Talland.

His high spirits had lasted all through the long foggy journey, and he had felt happy enough to deny himself the half-crown lunch on the train and be content with coffee and sandwiches—Johnnie could deny himself anything when he felt happy. His spirits had had perhaps a dip on his arrival in Hudley station, which looked cold and gloomy and uninteresting; and he was disappointed to find that the fog hid the well-loved lights which sprinkled the massive bulk of Awe Hill. But when he had dismounted from the tram and was at last approaching Royd Bank he sang aloud—Johnnie had a pleasant tenor voice—a Gilbertian chorus, from a sheer lightness of heart which defied the heavy suitcase he was carrying. When he had rung the bell and was standing on the rubber mat in the porch his spirits dropped again, and he had a moment of agonised suspense. Suppose something was different, suppose Jennifer was dead, suppose the Armitages did not live here now at all? Suppose this was a strange house and did not want him? His heart grew chill at the thought, and his good resolutions trembled in the balance. But how absurd! Had not Luke written from this address only a few weeks ago?

The door opened, and it was Jennifer who stood there, and

Jennifer was undoubtedly pleased to see him; and immediately his spirits bounded to the height of making her conspire with him to play a joke on Luke. And he had seen Luke, and found that, although Luke had obligingly developed so as to be on a level with the matured Johnnie, he was fundamentally just the same—a trifle slow, so that Johnnie could say affectionately "Don't you see, silly?" several times while he was explaining how he had left teaching because he hated it, and taken this splendid post in the commercial world. Yes, Luke was a trifle slow, but he was staunch and sure. Johnnie could see that beneath his correctly offhand air his old friend was moved by his return and intensely glad of it. And they had gone along the familiar hall, round the familiar corner into the familiar dining-room, which was full of beautiful things—acquired by the late Mr. Armitage—and therefore pleasing to Johnnie; and Mrs. Armitage had welcomed him most cordially, and all the world was very bright and glowing, and ugly things were forgotten. Then he asked gaily: "But where's little Imogen?"

A girl's voice, rather confused, said "Here I am," and Imogen stepped into the pool of soft yellow light shed by the candles.

Johnnie looked at her. The yellow flowers, the lights, the silver, their gleaming reflections multiplied about the shadowy room, Imogen's dark hair and eyes, the pale oval of her face, her slender neck rising like the stem of a flower from the rich soft folds of her dress—it all composed itself into a perfect picture, an exquisite nocturne of black and gold, at which Johnnie gazed with a sudden intense and wild sensation—sweet, overpowering, poignant—of her beauty. It was poignant because of that tragic, ruinous, devastating imbecility of his down there in the Midlands, which cut him off from Imogen for ever. He had never realised before quite how much it cut him off, but now beneath her clear glance

he knew himself unspeakably soiled and degraded; he felt that he was looking up at her from the sombre depths of a great moral abyss. How could he have been so tragically mad, so fatally erring! It was not so much the external facts as the spiritual declension they signified which troubled him. How could he have brought himself to actions so base and low!

"She's grown a good deal since you last saw her, Johnnie," observed Mrs. Armitage with calm pride, smiling blandly at his obvious amaze and admiration.

"She has indeed," murmured Johnnie in an indescribable tone. He decided that Imogen was like an Ingres portrait, and felt pleased with himself for knowing enough to think so; and suddenly his spirits soared. After all, was he not engaged in making his dead self a stepping-stone to higher, finer, greater things? He was back in Hudley at Luke's side—safe; there would be no more atrocious lapses; the past need never be known here, and the future might be, indeed should be, golden. He threw back his handsome head and laughed. "Oh yes," he cried gaily, "she's grown really considerably." He gave Imogen's hand a brotherly little squeeze, and looked with friendly candour into her dark eyes. Mrs. Armitage's smile of satisfaction deepened, and she beamed upon Imogen with her head on one side.

"Now what about dinner, Johnnie?" she inquired in her high drawling tones. "We have reached the pudding stage, but Jennifer will find you something more substantial if you're hungry. Boys are always hungry," she added. "That is, if you allow yourself to be called a boy, Johnnie. Luke doesn't; he's a young man or something nondescript of that sort."

Johnnie was really extremely hungry, but to prove to himself that he could step on his dead indulgent self whenever he chose he waved the something more substantial aside with

an airy gesture of refusal, and the waiting Jennifer was instructed to bring the pudding in at once. Soon, in the best of spirits, but with Johnnie's hunger only very partially assuaged, they were all repairing to the drawing-room.

This apartment, with its bright wood fire, its pale walls and pleasant chintzes, its good water-colours and fine oak pieces chosen by Mr. Armitage, seemed to Johnnie intensely bright and home-like after his long sojourn in the dark and gloomy places of his own soul. It was, indeed, quite a pleasant place, in that almost everything in it, however shabby, had originally been chosen with taste; its only second-rate feature was the upright rosewood piano. "Of course Imogen ought to have a grand to do her music justice," Mrs. Armitage was wont to observe to her friends with a martyred smile, "but equally of course I can't possibly afford one." Johnnie looked about him like a returned exile, commenting on a familiar feature here and there, and drinking it all in with a deep feeling of happiness, and exquisite sensation of relief that he had escaped from the terrible and ugly shadows into this fair place of light and safety. Luke poked the fire, which sent out a shower of sparks like a dying squib.

"But what are you doing in this part of the world, Johnnie?" inquired Mrs. Armitage, arranging herself and her scarf in an arm-chair. "I can't imagine," she drawled rather frigidly, "anyone who has once managed to leave Hudley wishing to return to it."

"You can't?" cried Johnnie, with such horror in his voice that Mrs. Armitage was obliged to smile. She obviously expected, however, to receive an answer to her question; the dreaded moment of explanation was at hand. Colouring slightly, and with his heart beating in great choking thumps, Johnnie airily explained that this good post—he did not specify its duties—had been offered to him by a friend of his father's, and that as a matter of fact he had jumped at it; he

had not cared, he said, for teaching, and was glad to transfer his activities to the commercial world.

"I should have thought an academic life would have suited you so much better," observed his hostess critically. "And besides, what do you know about textiles, Johnnie? Not," she went on, to poor Johnnie's immense relief, "that I should understand if you told me. The entire process of cloth manufacture is a complete mystery to me—I never had anything to do with it, so I'm completely in the dark." She smiled with lofty condescension; she was fond of announcing this (quite fictitious) ignorance of the staple industry of the town where she had lived for almost a quarter of a century—she evidently regarded it as indicating an immense superiority, a difference almost of caste, on her part. "And did your father approve of your change of profession?"

"Oh yes," said Johnnie, outwardly calm, but inwardly tasting despair. "He thought it a good chance for me." He hesitated. "After all," he went on largely, "putting the thing on its lowest basis, there are more opportunities in commerce —I mean, it's the business people who make the money."

"You're quite *right,* Johnnie," agreed Mrs. Armitage slowly and with emphasis. "That's just what I'm always telling Luke. But his heart is fixed on medicine, and it's no use thwarting natural inclinations in the choice of a profession. My husband used to say that no good ever came of it."

"And how long will it be before Luke puts up a brass plate and starts killing people off?" inquired Johnnie in a more natural tone, looking at his friend, who merely snorted at this well-worn cynicism, and passed the cigarettes.

"I'm sure I couldn't tell you, Johnnie," said Mrs. Armitage with assumed weariness. "Luke is *not* communicative, as you may have observed."

"Oh, Mother!" protested Imogen.

"Of course I know *you* think everything Luke does is

perfect, my dear," said her mother with a smile. "Sit down, Johnnie—that is, if you've finished counting the pictures. We're all very glad to have you back in Hudley again. Even Luke is glad, though you might not think it. It will be like old times."

With a load rolled off his heart by this acceptance of his explanation, Johnnie sat down in the corner of a rather springless Chesterfield and began to talk. He talked brilliantly, sure of his audience; it was months, nay years, since he had been conscious of talking in this easy, care-free, open-hearted, soul-satisfying manner. He talked of books, of plays, of politics, and he and Luke (who wished to attack the existing social structure, while Johnnie, curiously enough, supported it whole-heartedly) had their customary skirmish on these points. In his political views Johnnie was ably supported by Mrs. Armitage's cool aphorisms, and it was pleasure to him to be approved by a woman of such worldly wisdom, such complete social correctness, as he had always known her to be. He talked of pictures and of music, and found that in music Luke had got beyond him, and that Imogen too could make shy contributions. (Mrs. Armitage, of course, did not fail to voice her plaint about the piano, but she said it mechanically; it was not worth while wasting her best effects on Johnnie.) Having thus exhausted the arts, the two boys began them all over again. They discussed how little they knew of literature when they parted, and how much they knew now, and flitted about from point to point on a score of topics, revelling in the feeling that there were endless days in front of them, heaps of time to sound those topics to their profoundest depths. Through all this Johnnie's eyes kept turning, as if drawn by a magnet, to where Imogen sat on a low stool, her hands clapsed about her knees. In the other room her beauty had been gleaming and mysterious; here against the chintzes it seemed bright, ethereal, reassur-

ing: she was Luke's sister, and Johnnie would see her many times a week, perhaps every day, for years. At the thought a quick leap of joy throbbed in Johnnie's pulse.

The evening wore on. Johnnie began to preceive that he must really take himelf to his new lodgings soon, or his landlady would give him up for the night. But it was so difficult to go from this feast of friendship to the cold civility of hired rooms, made desolate, as they were sure to be, with texts and china dogs and aspidistras, that he let the perception slide for a while. Half an hour later Mrs. Armitage offered him a bed for the night. Johnnie started up, blushing ingenuously, and explained that he was expected in Daisy Street —not that he knew where that flowery place was, except that it lay somewhere in the Denbridge direction. For a moment he had a pang of yearning—if only he had been going back to St. Mark's Vicarage, as in the good old days before his mother was ill and his father queer and he himself marred by that unfortunate Loughmore experience! Concrete images of his life alone in lodgings rose up before him, and he felt chilled and intimidated. Mrs. Armitage and Luke between them produced the information that Daisy Street was halfway down Denbridge Hill, striking off to the left just at that awkward corner by the shop; and Luke added: "But of course I'll go down with you," and Johnnie's spirits rose a little. He received Mrs. Armitage's invitation to spend Sunday with them rather mournfully, however, and said good-bye to Imogen with the conviction that he never wanted anything less in his life than to leave her.

The front door closed heavily behind the two lads; with a sigh Johnnie braced himself to meet the damp gloom which seemed so symbolic of the outer world's attitude to him. A shaft of light struck across the asphalt path by his feet; he turned for a last look at the friendly house, and saw Imogen at the window: she had drawn aside the curtain and was

quietly watching their departure. For a brief moment Johnnie's composure quite gave way; it was too much: the ordeal had been too long, and the relief too sweet. The brilliant Johnnie Talland, whose manner in society was always so cool, composed, and easy, felt his throat swell and his eyes smart with hot, hysterical tears. He made a kind of despairing gesture of farewell to Imogen and turned away, keeping his head down to hide his contorted face.

"Let me have your case," suggested the matter-of-fact Luke, stretching out a hand for it.

"It's all right, thanks," replied Johnnie thickly, taking a firmer grip of it. He resolved then and there that he *would* do fine things for Imogen, be his rooms never so chill and aspidistra-hung; he would play the game and run straight, and cultivate all the simple domestic virtues; he would retrieve all his lost moral ground and make glorious advances, if she would only look at him like that from those clear trusting eyes.

When the two boys had passed out of sight Imogen let the curtain slowly fall, and turned back to the fire, musing. She had seen that revealing twist of Johnnie's face just now, and her former impression was confirmed—poor Johnnie was not happy, though she alone seemed to know it; and the knowledge sent a deep pain through her heart. What had he done during all those long six years away from Hudley? she wondered. He had said so little of them, and she with her lack of experience could not fill in the gap from mere imagination. She stood by the hearth and gazed down into the soft glowing embers of the fire, and let her mind play dreamily around the period of Johnnie's absence. And suddenly she was intensely, keenly jealous of those six years and all that had happened in them: she was jealous of the people Johnnie had met, the landscapes he had seen, the very roads and streets he had trodden—hard, cold, unfeeling things

they must all have been to write that air of disillusion on his person. What a waste of him it had been all these years; his brilliance, like a golden fountain in a deserted park, playing on in vain, unseen and unappreciated, while she whose eyes would have been so dazzled by the spectacle was waiting for him here in Hudley all the time!

"It's extraordinary what *luck* some people *have,*" soliloquised Mrs. Armitage with her usual fretful emphasis, stretching her ringed hands to the fire. "Here's Johnnie got this *excellent* business position, which may lead anywhere, dropped into his lap from the sky, as it were. *We* never have any luck like that in *our* family. It will be years before Luke earns a penny, even if he comes safely through all his examinations at the first attempt, which unfortunately is by no means probable." (Luke had been obliged to make two attempts at his first medical.) "And then, as Johnnie says, there's so much more money to be made in business than in any profession. Your poor father often said the same to me. However, we must do the best we can, I suppose." She sighed. "You ought to have been in bed long ago, Imogen; I can't have you staying up late and getting haggard. Run away with you, child." She turned up her well-preserved face, and Imogen affectionately kissed it. Mrs. Armitage gave a smile of deep satisfaction, laid a hand on her daughter's white arm, and concluded with a kind of dignified playfulness: "It's evident that you made a decided impression on Master Johnnie, my dear."

II

There followed two joyous, brightly coloured months which seemed to flash past Imogen like a streak of light; though on the other hand they seemed to have gone on since the beginning of time, for she could not remember what life was like before they started. Wherever Imogen went that winter she appeared between Luke on the right hand and Johnnie on the left; the two boys escorted her everywhere, and treated her with the most distinguished consideration, as though she had been a princess and they two devoted cavaliers of her court. Innumerable times did the trio set off together for some hospitable house, light-hearted, well-clothed, well-fed, Johnnie having dropped in to dinner or walked up the Royd Bank path just as Luke opened the door for Imogen to emerge. Innumerable times did Luke and Imogen find Johnnie waiting for them at some hospitable gate. Indeed, if by some chance Johnnie did not call for the Armitages, as he had arranged, or was late at the function they were all supposed to be attending, the whole world seemed to Imogen to throb with painful suspense. If, again, it was doubtful whether Johnnie would appear at that particular function at all, as was sometimes the case—the Tallands' old friends had soon discovered his presence in Hudley, and as an excellent dancer, an amusing talker, a good bridge-player, and altogether a fellow calculated to shed brilliance on any gathering, he was bombarded with invitations, all of which he joyously accepted—if his presence was thus doubtful, Imogen became quiet and absent, all

her thoughts turned inward into longing; her eyes sought the door rather often, and the function, even if it were one of the dances Imogen loved, seemed flat and dim and empty and intensely unprofitable, so unprofitable that it would have been far nicer to have stayed at home. All at once, perhaps, just when she had given up all hope of him, Johnnie would appear in the doorway, smiling and jolly, his dark eyes sparkling and his handsome head held high; and immediately it was as if somebody had turned on double the quantity of electric lights. Imogen's heart would give a great leap, and the words "He's come!" seemed to resound through the now bright and exhilarating air. The lights, the flowers, the music, and the people composed themselves at once into a fitting background for Johnnie; the whole affair became a vague but delightful blur in which Johnnie alone stood out clear and sharp and actual. At first Imogen had been used to greet him, as he came in at the door on such occasions, with a smile as frank and joyous as his own; but lately, as soon as she caught sight of his eager face, she turned away, bent her head and pretended not to notice his arrival until he stood before her, gallant and debonair, explaining to Luke with humorous exaggeration the idiotic cause of his preposterous lateness, and smiling down at her, while he scrawled "J's" all over her programme, the rather special smile which, as he had once jokingly announced, he kept for female members of the Armitage family. He seemed to keep a good many things, including an astonishingly large portion of his free time, for the female members of the Armitage family; indeed, Mrs. Armitage sometimes—though never when Johnnie was there—fretfully suggested that he might without any disadvantage keep a little less. She always, however, withdrew this charge under the furious onslaught from Luke which it never failed to provoke; smiling resignedly, she admitted that Johnnie was an exceptionally nice boy and

that his visits kept them all lively, and Johnnie continued to frequent Royd Bank to his heart's content.

That evening, for example, he had come dashing up to Royd Bank on his new motor-cycle, and announced that it was ages since he last saw them—it was really two days—that he had got a rise in salary, and they simply must go out and do something jolly to celebrate it. There was one of the Wild-West films Imogen adored showing at the Station Street cinema. (Imogen's mild fondness for Wild-West films had been exaggerated by Johnnie into a family joke.) Luke had smiled at this, noticed that Imogen's face was very bright, connected the brightness quite erroneously with the suggestion of Wild-West films—it was really due to the reappearance of Johnnie after two days' absence—and agreed to the excursion, so that Imogen, wide-eyed and serious, was now gazing earnestly down across the crowded Station Street hall towards the screen.

A colossal and dazzling presentation of the heroine's features, on which rolled large solid-looking tears like glass marbles, was at the moment offering itself to the jaded gaze of the spectators. The drama had reached the point where vice was temporarily supreme, the ultimate triumph of long-suffering virtue being still two or three reels ahead. How *could* people behave as the villain and his female accomplice were now behaving, wondered Imogen, as the heroine's enlarged features were replaced by a full-length picture of her appealing, with clasped hands and bended knees, to the stony-hearted pair. How could they sleep and eat and positively laugh while they were thus engaged in wrecking other people's happiness? It was a mystery to her, for life must be simply unendurable on those terms; the shame of it could surely not be borne. How did it really feel to be a wrecker of lives? she wondered. What was the scientific explanation of wickedness? She would ask Luke, though

probably she would get nothing out of him but a snort of derision directed at the wild improbability and naïve sentimentalism of the film—Luke was always very severe upon films. Imogen followed the drama with rapt attention until at length the last prolonged embrace, which took place against a background of majestic mountains and waving pines, suddenly vanished from the screen. The orchestra brought their long-drawn-out *pianissimo* note to a tremulous conclusion; down there in the darkness six round lamps brightened gradually until they glowed in the semblance of colossal oranges; purple curtains were seen to slide gracefully back and forth across the now featureless screen; and this display of modern decorative art culminated in the scrawled notice that there would be a musical interlude before the commencement of the next film.

Luke sighed, tightened his lips, and threw himself to one side of his chair. To begin with, Luke did not like the sound of syncopated clashings, and secondly, he had work to do for the morrow; examinations loomed ahead, and he had embarked on to-night's excursion really rather against his better judgment. Remembering the alacrity with which Imogen had gone off for her hat and coat, Luke did not now exactly regret that he had agreed to the excursion, but he thought rather anxiously of his work, looked at his watch, and wondered how much longer it would be before they would have seen the programme "round."

Johnnie leaned forward and spoke across Imogen.

"Look here, Luke," he said, "you go home and get back to your work, and I'll bring Imogen along when we've seen the thing all through."

Luke said "Ah!" thoughtfully, looked at his watch again, and appeared to consider the suggestion.

"Go on!" urged Johnnie. "You know you're panting to

get back to your anatomy, or whatever it is." As Luke still seemed to hesitate, Johnnie continued jokingly, turning to Imogen: "He thinks nobody can look after you properly but himself."

The Armitages smiled and met each other's glance with a serene confidence, founded on the belief that they understood each other remarkably well and Johnnie no less so.

"All right," agreed Luke comfortably, rising. "I'll be off before the drum starts. Don't be too late, Talland."

"Nothing like it," Johnnie assured him with emphasis. "We shall follow you up in twenty minutes or so at the outside." Luke nodded his satisfaction and began to edge his way courteously past the row of people who separated him from the aisle. "I shan't come in to Royd Bank," continued Johnnie to his retreating back. "I'll just place Imogen safely in the porch, snatch my bike and vanish."

Luke made a farewell movement with one hand, and disappeared up the white-edged steps into the outer darkness, where a cluster of pale blobs denoted a knot of people waiting anxiously for seats. His place beside Imogen was immediately filled by a solid young man who sank into the velvet seat rather clumsily, with a sigh of relief for the termination of his long wait. Imogen delicately withdrew her skirts; her neighbour, with an alarmed apology for disturbing her, hastily retreated into the farthest corner of his chair. Imogen was sorry that her mild unspoken remonstrance had apparently distressed him so—she would not have hurt his feelings for the world—but just then a ray of limelight descended upon the musical conductor, the orchestra emitted a roll of drums and threw itself headlong into a potpourri of popular tunes, and Imogen forgot him; for Imogen, unlike her brother, rather enjoyed musical interludes. The orchestra often played songs of the moment, and some of the audience

—not, of course, the Armitages or Johnnie—"joined in" the chorus; and this humming which rose from the crowded hall, subdued and timorous at first, gradually swelling in volume as the singers grew bolder, pleased Imogen and excited her without her quite knowing why. The words of the songs, which were flashed upon the screen from time to time, were, of course, extremely silly, and often vulgar; but they voiced a sentiment which was true to life, a sentiment which every member of the audience had felt or would shortly feel, a sentiment with which Imogen was somehow just at present intensely concerned. Just such a song was being played now, and as the lilting tune began to sound softly in the air about her Imogen's whole personality seemed to melt into a strange poignant yearning; to sit at Johnnie's side beneath the dim glow of coloured lights, and listen to these throbbing songs of love, was almost intolerably sweet, and every note seemed to beat more deeply upon her heart the certainty that she loved him, loved him! She seemed to have lived through centuries of vivid, vital, and profound experience before at last the limelight left the orchestra, and the conductor, after repeated bowings in response to the audience's applause, shut the little curtained gate behind him and retired into his habitual obscurity. The orange lamps faded and went out, and the ordinary cold electric light abruptly flooded the hall and made Imogen blink. There was a great stir of people rising and leaving the building, and those remaining turned their heads and looked about them, curious to discover if any of their acquaintances had lurked unknown in the darkness. The man beside Imogen was revealed as possessing a fair, good-natured, rather simple face—Imogen instinctively felt motherly towards him, though he was obviously ten or twelve years older than herself—and an excellent tailor, Johnnie's youthful spruceness appearing thin and unsubstantial beside his solid elegance.

"Good thing old Luke went home," murmured Johnnie in Imogen's ear. "He *would* have suffered."

"But you don't mind, do you?" queried Imogen rather anxiously.

"Mind?" said Johnnie with a peculiar inflexion, looking into her eyes. "I enjoyed every minute of it."

He was interrupted by Imogen's neighbour, who leaned forward and said in hearty Yorkshire tones: "Hello, Talland! I thought I owned you when I first came in, but I wasn't sure till you spoke."

Johnnie coloured and responded "Hullo!" with so much less than his usual cordiality that Imogen knew the intruder was unwelcome, and looked at him as discouragingly as she was able.

"You haven't been up to our place for a goodish while," continued the young man, mild reproach in his voice.

"No," admitted Johnnie feebly.

"How are you getting on down in Denbridge?" pursued his interlocutor. "Do you like?"

"Oh yes," said Johnnie, wincing, perhaps at the Yorkshirism. "I like it very well indeed, thanks."

"I'm glad," said the young man, nodding thoughtfully. He looked at Imogen so long and with such an obvious desire to be made known to her that Johnnie was constrained to introduce them.

"Imogen, this is Mr. Thornton," he said stiffly. "Miss Armitage."

Imogen acknowledged the introduction by a rather chilly and conventional smile, and Mr. Thornton's open countenance registered curiosity mingled with pleasure.

"I think I've mentioned my old friend Luke Armitage to you," said Johnnie with hot cheeks—he had noticed the curiosity.

"Oh yes, of course, *I* remember," agreed Mr. Thornton

heartily. "I remember now—your father mentioned him when he wrote. Your brother?" he suggested to Imogen, and nodded at her assent.

There was a pause. Imogen looked at Johnnie, and was distressed to see the gloom and misery of his face. To her relief the lights began to fade, and the title of the next film appeared on the screen.

"Well, I'm glad you're getting on all right in Denbridge," concluded Mr. Thornton, settling himself comfortably back in his chair.

Johnnie gulped, turned to Imogen and observed in a strained voice: "It was through Mr. Thornton's kindness that I was able to come back to Hudley, you know."

"Oh, *was* it?" cried Imogen, implying by her tone that that put an entirely different complexion on Mr. Thornton. Full of remorse for her cold reception of the person who had restored Johnnie to her, she turned to him with a beaming friendliness in her dark eyes. "My brother would be very grateful to you if he were here," she told him seriously.

Mr. Thornton seemed to enjoy her change of front. "Your brother thinks a lot of young Talland, does he?" he said, smiling and nodding, and bending towards her with a slightly heightened colour on his fresh face.

"We all do," said Imogen with her grave simplicity. "Naturally."

"Oh come, Imogen," expostulated Johnnie with an uneasy laugh. "I can't rise and bow here, you know." He directed his attention rather markedly to the screen, as a hint to his companion to do the same.

The film which was now unrolling itself was one of the so-called "comic" type in which the throwing of squashy missiles and the threatened loss of necessary garments are supposed to excite intense hilarity. As its theme developed

Imogen sighed and looked away; while Johnnie sarcastically outlined the headings of a paper "On the Artistic Significance and Moral Value of Custard Pies in America," which he said he should one day deliver as a Romanes lecture. This proceeding seemed to raise his spirits for a while, but as the film's futility deepened he threw himself impatiently about in his chair and gave vent to disgusted sighs. Mr. Thornton, on the other hand, laughed heartily at all the most indelicate jokes.

"I know it's awfully silly," he confided apologetically to Imogen, "but I simply can't help laughing."

Imogen smiled kindly, and was about to say something soothing when Johnnie whispered savagely in her other ear: "Do let's go—this is beyond human endurance."

Rather confused, she agreed and rose.

"Are you going?" said Mr. Thornton in wistful tones, half rising to facilitate their passage.

"Yes; good night," replied Johnnie, moving Imogen firmly on.

"Good night," reciprocated Mr. Thornton. "Mind you come out and see us fairly soon, now—and bring young Armitage with you."

"Thanks very much," said Johnnie insincerely over his shoulder, as he reached the end of the row and gained the aisle, where Imogen was waiting for him. He shepherded her carefully through the crowd and out of the swing doors to the draughty landing; they went down the narrow stairs, jostled by other departing couples, and passed out under the dazzling coloured lights of the pseudo-Grecian porch into the street. Both sighed with relief, for the night air felt clean and friendly after the fetid atmosphere of the cinema.

"Tram or walk?" inquired Johnnie. "It's a lovely night."

"Oh, walk, I think," pronounced Imogen, and Johnnie joyfully turned towards Askroyd Road.

They threaded their way through the dispersing crowd and traversed the wide crossing in silence.

"He has a nice face, I think," mused Imogen then, as they passed beneath the heavy shadow of the police courts.

"Who? The great Brearley?" inquired Johnnie in a moody tone.

"'Brearley'?" repeated Imogen.

"Brearley Thornton," elucidated Johnnie rather crossly. "Yes—he's a very decent fellow. No brains, of course, as you observed, but a very decent soul. He's been a good friend to me."

"Why were you so annoyed, then, when he first spoke to you?" queried Imogen mildly.

"Well——" said Johnnie, and hesitated. "He really got me my present job," he began.

"Of course, if you're sorry you came back to Hudley——" Imogen rallied him softly, with a little laugh.

"You know I'm not!" cried Johnnie hotly. "It's only that seeing him reminds me of the time before I came back, and I hate remembering that. I hate it! I was simply wretched when I was a schoolmaster, Imogen," he told her vehemently, his young face white and harassed.

"Oh, Johnnie!" said Imogen with infinite compassion. "I'm so sorry."

"And what's more," added Johnnie in a wild, uneven tone, "I made an awful mess of it."

"Oh, Johnnie!" repeated Imogen, this time with complete incredulity. "I'm sure you didn't." She laughed softly, and repeated, *"I'm* sure you didn't," with a wise little shake of her head, for she had long since learned to attribute Johnnie's occasional moods of abysmal self-depreciation to his possession of the poetic temperament. Johnnie sometimes produced verses which even the extremely critical Mrs. Armitage thought good, and Imogen had always understood

—biographies constantly laid stress upon it—that such brilliance always had to be paid for by black hours of misery and gloom. That Johnnie had these shadowed hours was merely, to Imogen, a proof of the authenticity of his genius, and she gladly accepted the task of cheering, soothing, and illuminating his passage through the darkness. "Why should you worry about it now?" she continued, in her soft compassionate tones. "It's all over now. Why not forget about it and be happy?"

Johnnie gave a long sigh. "Well, that's true," he agreed at length, and after another pause said jokingly: "It's a good idea, Imogen." As though a great weight had been rolled off his mind he suddenly threw back his head, and began to hum cheerfully and look about him.

They had now passed the last of the town buildings and were on the open road. The weather had forgotten the approach of Christmas and become warm and balmy; a soft breeze was blowing, the trees on the embankment rustled their bare branches up and down in long rhythmical movements like the surge of waves, and dark fleecy clouds sailed rapidly across the moonlit sky. Across the valley Awe Hill loomed up impressively, its huge black bulk dotted with lights which in this mild autumnal air shone softly yellow. Brightly lighted empty trams bumped noisily past on their way to the municipal shed, travelling with unwonted speed on the only level stretch of road in Hudley; while occasional motor-cars flashed their enormous headlights dazzingly in Imogen's eyes, leaving an intenser darkness behind when they had passed. Johnnie strolled along with his head thrown back and his hands in his pockets, singing beneath his breath "Now softly wakes my heart" in a semi-satirical manner which did not conceal his real enjoyment of the tune. He regarded the flying clouds pleasurably, broke off his song long enough to observe with enthusiasm: "It's a glorious night,

simply glorious!" and began again more loudly: "'A-ah, once again, once agai-ain, I imploore thee!'"

Imogen walked beside him in an intense and all-pervading happiness. The clouds, the lights, the trees, the black bulk of Awe Hill, the half-hidden moon, the sound of their footsteps on the moist stones, Johnnie's recovered cheerfulness, his singing, all seemed to conspire to make the scene Elysian for her. "'Delilah, Delilah, I adoooore thee!'" sang Johnnie with expression, and Imogen gave her soft little laugh. Yes, the night was perfect, and she was intensely, unreasonably happy, and her thoughts flew off instinctively to Luke, the natural partner of her joys.

"Poor Luke!" she said softly. "I'm sorry he had to go home early."

Johnnie abruptly broke off his song, and bent towards her with his whole face vivid and aglow. "I'm *not,*" he said with emphasis.

"Not?" murmured Imogen questioningly, while her heart began to beat with a wild expectant throb.

"Not sorry Luke had to leave us," Johnnie enlarged.

Imogen, confused and agitated, did not know what she ought to say in reply to this, and they took a few steps onward in a rather breathless silence.

"I don't know why you should say that, Johnnie," faltered Imogen then in her gentle voice.

"It's the first time I've been really alone with you since I came," explained Johnnie fiercely, halting and turning towards her.

"Oh—is it?" said Imogen. She was too truthful, however, to leave the matter quite like that, and she added quietly: "Yes, I know it is."

Suddenly Johnnie seized her hands, and began to pour into her willing ears a youthful lover's rhapsody, a brilliant, golden stream of words, a glowing, sparkling flood in which

all the poetry, the love of beauty, the rebellion and the weakness which made Johnnie Talland what he was surged tumultuously along to lay the tribute of his love at Imogen's feet. Imogen gazed up at him in mute rapture, her dark eyes wide, her soft breast tremulous. He told her again that he loved her, and his lips touched hers. With a little cry she gave herself to his arms, and they clung to each other for a long moment of ecstasy. To Imogen everything in the world seemed suddenly to form part of a vast and gorgeous design—her childhood with Luke and Johnnie was the coloured border; then came those dull interim years of Johnnie's absence as a kind of drab preparatory background, during which she had grown up and come to herself and was ready and had waited; and then Johnnie had come again, and the rich, vivid, intricate pattern of her life had at once begun to weave itself. All its rich strands had come together for the indescribable radiance of that moment, and there would be many such; they would recur in the natural course of the design.

There was a long interval in which Imogen and Johnnie, deep in an exquisite dream of young love, were not conscious of the external world; it was without either of them quite knowing how they had come there that they presently found themselves walking up the Royd Bank path, Imogen's hand tucked beneath Johnnie's arm in an intimacy which seemed already to have lasted for centuries. The breeze had now died down, the moon was hidden behind a heavy bank of clouds, and a faint moisture in the valley blurred the Awe Hill lights; but to Imogen the dark night scene seemed to shimmer with dazzling light, like a diamond, and high, clear music sounded ringingly through the air. The lovers reached the Royd Bank porch and reluctantly rang for admission. There was a pause. They exchanged a few low-toned sentences of farewell; Johnnie become impassioned, and his

hands caressed Imogen's cheek and hair while he murmured incoherent words about all the noble and wonderful things he was going to do for her if only she would love him. Imogen smiled wisely as she listened; she knew perfectly well that so long as Johnnie loved her it did not matter to her in the least whether he were distinguished or obscure, but she somehow knew also that, Johnnie being Johnnie, it would be much better not to tell him so. It was really astonishing how much more she seemed to know about Johnnie and herself and life in general, now, than when she had left Royd Bank earlier in the evening. But on further reflection it was perhaps not so astonishing after all; it was all part of that exciting many-coloured pattern which Johnnie's return to Hudley had begun to weave for her. How well she remembered that night when he returned! Poor boy! He had had a dark mood of despondency on him then, just as he had had to-night in the cinema. Well, in future it would be her privilege and duty to drive all Johnnie's clouds away. Imogen was not afraid of the poetic temperament, at any rate not as it was represented in Johnnie Talland. She gave herself up consciously to the joy of his embrace.

The latch clicked behind them, and they drew apart—Johnnie rather hastily, Imogen with her usual serene calm. The door opened and Jennifer appeared against the light.

"I've brought her back safe and sound, you see," said Johnnie rather hysterically.

"You're very late," Jennifer reproved him in her dry tones. "And don't leave that machine of yours in the porch again, Master Johnnie, if you please; it's very awkward in the dark. Besides, somebody might run off with it; we aren't in Cornwall here."

To Imogen's surprise, Johnnie, instead of making some joyous repartee, hung his head and mumbled, and began forthwith to wheel the cycle out of the porch.

"Good night, Johnnie," said Imogen in her clear soft voice.

"Good night," said Johnnie.

He started his machine there and then—a proceeding greatly objected to by Jennifer, who accused him of wanting to deafen her—mounted it and rode away out of the open gate without another look behind him.

III

The train burst out of the long sulphurous tunnel into bright January sunshine, drew itself slowly alongside the curving Hudley platform, and stopped. Doors were thrown open here and there, and a few passengers stepped down from the train; they were mostly women, for it was at a slack time in the middle of the morning. Imogen descended with the rest, and walked thoughtfully towards the station steps; the unexpected bright interval after days of sullen skies and persistent rain was very welcome to her, but her spirit was not altogether free to enjoy it, for Johnnie and Johnnie's affairs filled her horizon and agitated her mind.

To begin with, she was troubled to reflect that neither Mrs. Armitage nor Luke had yet been told of her relations with Johnnie. It horrified her to think that her conduct towards Johnnie—as, for instance, in allowing him to meet her at the station on her return from her bi-weekly music lesson in Bradford and walk with her to the Royd Bank gate—almost amounted to a deception of her mother and brother, and a deception which was not justified by any reason she knew. She could not quite perceive at what particular moment her conduct had ceased to be straightforward and begun to be dissimulating; certainly she had not been conscious of that deplorable moment when it occurred—unless, indeed, it had occurred at the very beginning of everything, on that night when Johnnie first told her that he loved her. She had been conscious then of a slight feeling of disappointment and surprise when Johnnie rode off without a word to Jennifer to indicate that the world was

changed for them. If only he had said something then, everything would have been so much better. Or if he had taken an early opportunity to mention it to Luke! But he had said nothing, and Imogen, too, had confided in no one. At first there had seemed nothing, since Johnnie apparently thought there was nothing, to tell; and then as time went on there seemed altogether too much. Perhaps Johnnie felt that too, reflected Imogen; but the longer the concealment went on the more difficult the ultimate revelation would be. What made the matter worse was that lately Johnnie had been coming much less to Royd Bank. He had not even been invited to spend Christmas Day with the Armitages, going instead to the Thorntons at High Roebuck. Imogen did not quite know how the decrease in his visits had come about; it might have been a natural consequence of Johnnie's numerous invitations, or it might have been due to Mrs. Armitage's skilful management. Imogen feared that it was the latter, and was uneasy as to her mother's motive. In any case, the result had been that Imogen had met Johnnie at the station and in the street more often than she met him in her mother's house; and this seemed to her unworthy of their love, in which there was, surely, nothing of which they need be ashamed. This concealment must come to an end; it spoiled Imogen's happiness, made a stain on her conscience and a sore in her heart.

As she reached the top of the steps she saw Johnnie waiting for her a few discreet yards on the other side of the barrier. He was looking particularly handsome and debonair; and as he caught sight of her he took his hat off with such a joyous flourish that she guessed at once that things had gone well with him. Her heart leaped with pleasure; she would be so very, very glad if it proved that his affairs were all straightened out at last—glad for several reasons. And after all, as she had told herself hopefully, there was no

tremendous hindrance to the straightening out of his affairs; they were not so terribly difficult or so terribly bad; the only thing he had really done wrong, when you came to consider it, was to omit to pay for his lodgings for a month or two. This had come out two or three weeks ago, when Johnnie, calling at Royd Bank one evening, had proposed that they should go to the theatre, where something really good was for once in a way being performed. Mrs. Armitage had promptly announced that Imogen was too tired, and Luke had declined on the score of lack of cash.

"Really, Luke!" drawled Mrs. Armitage, annoyed, as she always was, by Luke's frank admission of the family's impecuniosity.

"Well, dash it all," said Luke jokingly, "Johnnie, here, owes me seventeen and six."

The blood rushed to Johnnie's face, and he instantly repaid the money, not without some nervous counting out of silver. Mrs. Armitage watched the incident with a rather sinister air of reserve, receiving Johnnie's jokes on the subject with a frigid and cynical smile. Imogen noticed that Johnnie's fingers shook as he threw down the half-crowns, and that his eyes had that look of harassed perplexity which always augured one of his desponding moods—obviously there was more behind his discomfiture than a mere seventeen and six. Imogen suffered keenly as he forced a strained hilarity about his "debt," as he called it; and when, still painfully flushed, he had withdrawn—as he rapidly did, the theatre being now by tacit consent out of the question—she announced with the quiet simplicity which veiled her deepest feelings that her mother had been right in saying that she was tired, and that she would go at once to bed. Mrs. Armitage did not offer any objection, and kissed her silently. As Imogen lay in bed upstairs she could hear Luke's and her mother's voices active in what seemed a long and heated

argument. Were they discussing Johnnie? Canvassing his shortcomings? Imogen lay and suffered.

She had had an appointment with Johnnie next day, and had found him as she expected, white and haggard and in an agony of restlessness. In response to her sympathetic query he had admitted that he had not slept, and that he was troubled.

"Is it about money?" asked Imogen softly.

He turned upon her so savagely that Imogen literally shrank from him, for nobody had ever spoken to her like that before. For a moment the world seemed to be rocking beneath her feet. When she had recovered from the blow she found Johnnie still walking by her side, silent, moody, and in torment; she reflected, made up her mind, and pressed him for the details of his trouble. Gradually it all came out; he told her—but with what resentment, what bitterness, as if the whole thing were her fault!—that he had not paid his landlady for two months, and that she was worrying him for the money. At first on his return to Hudley, full of austere and virtuous resolutions, he had paid her weekly; but invitations showered upon him, and accepting invitations costs money, and he had put the whole of his weekly salary into his pocket and spent more of it than he had intended. Then, ashamed to admit to Mrs. Womersley that he could not pay her in full, he had told her he would pay monthly, meaning to make up the sum by saving hard in the next three weeks. In the end he had not paid her at all, because of the crowning folly of the motor-cycle. The machine had been offered to him, second-hand, at a low price, on payment of a small sum down, and he had optimistically imagined that it would save him money in his constant journeyings back and forth among his friends. The motor-cycle had been purchased from one of Johnnie's friends, and so Johnnie had felt obliged to pay up the instalments on it with compara-

tive regularity. It was now more than two months since Mrs. Womersley had had anything from him. Johnnie vaguely sketched in to Imogen, also, that the New Year would bring him in the customary crop of bills; but of course, of *course* he had simply forgotten that he owed Luke those shillings: he would have given them back to him ages ago if he had remembered. He hoped Imogen understood that.

Imogen found she understood the whole situation quite well, and she began at once to suggest practical remedies. Could Johnnie write to his father? "Oh no," said poor Johnnie in accents of such agony that Imogen did not mention Mr. Talland again. Could he—she hesitated—lay his difficulties before Luke or Mrs. Armitage? Johnnie told her furiously that he could not. Could he try his employer? "You mean old Ullathorne?" said Johnnie dubiously. No, Imogen had meant that young Mr. Thornton whom they had met in the cinema. "He's not my employer," exclaimed Johnnie, angry with Imogen for this stupid mistake. It gradually became plain—Imogen had not quite realised it before—that "old Ullathorne" had not yearned of his own free will to employ Johnnie's talents, but that Mr. Thornton had found Johnnie a place in a Hudley mill because Johnnie's father had asked him to do so. It also became plain to Imogen that Johnnie had not been strictly truthful to the Armitages about his place at old Ullathorne's, and that the wages he earned there were far less than he had allowed his friends to suppose. But Imogen understood all that, too, quite well; it was just part of Johnnie's—so natural and excusable—pride, and his disappointment at not having satisfied himself as a schoolmaster. She pressed Brearley Thornton upon her lover as his natural saviour; on Johnnie's own showing there were ties of friendship between their families, and Brearley was rich, while Imogen herself was sure that he was good-natured. Johnnie must apply to Brearley, and at once. The motor-

cycle must be sold. Then Johnnie must live quietly and go nowhere—Imogen would go nowhere, too; she was already practising small secret austerities out of sympathy for him—and make a tremendous spurt to pay the money back. Johnnie listened to all this with intense irritability; he argued each point with bitterness, and gave way with sulky reluctance to Imogen's sound common sense. He admitted at length that he supposed he must try the great Brearley; while he said this he glared at Imogen inimically, as though she had been some harsh scolding authority to whom he owed obedience but no love. And he had maintained this attitude more or less ever since; at their meetings his face lighted up as soon as he caught sight of her—he was obviously yearning for her presence—but at the first mention of Thornton or his affairs frowns clouded his brow and his manner became harsh and petulant in the extreme.

His application to Thornton, too, seemed to suffer the most awkward postponements. Johnnie could not find time to go out to High Roebuck and see him, he said—though he regularly left his work in the middle of the morning to meet Imogen at the station. Or else, he sometimes reported, he *had* seen him, but found him in a mood unfavourable to Johnnie's purpose. Imogen yearned achingly for the thing to be settled, for Brearley to lend the money—she was sure he would; he had that kind of face—and Johnnie to be happy again. Then perhaps he would remember that he loved her, and once more show her that he knew how to be chivalrous and gallant; and then, too, Mrs. Armitage and Luke could be told about herself and Johnnie, and everything would be fair and straight and open. The really best thing for Johnnie, Imogen had decided during the long hours when he was absent and her thoughts circled about him like doves, would be an early marriage with herself. Then she could keep those material things, which seemed to confuse him so much,

straight and under her control, and he could always be his best and wittiest and most charming self. She would not mind how poor they were. But, of course, the Tallands and Luke and Mrs. Armitage would be sure not to agree about this; parents and relatives, however kind, rarely did. As she reached this reflection Imogen proffered her ticket to the collector and passed through the barrier.

"Well!" exclaimed Johnnie, bounding joyously forward, "you're two and a half minutes late—I suppose it isn't bad for a stopping local train. Isn't it a glorious morning?" He lowered his voice to add: "I've heaps to tell you."

Imogen surrendered her music-case to his care and stepped out beside him. By mutual accord—though its implications wounded Imogen's spirit—they turned off the main street and sought Askroyd Road by devious back ways where they would have more privacy.

"Tell me what you've done," said Imogen then.

"Well," announced Johnnie loudly, glowing with relief, "it's all right—everything's absolutely all right. I've seen Brearley this morning, and we've arranged about the motor-bike and everything. I've left the bike with him, and I've got the money here." He tapped his breast pocket.

"How splendid!" cried Imogen joyously. "I knew he would."

"Yes, he really has been very decent to me," admitted Johnnie—"very decent indeed. I shall always be grateful to him, always. Always," he repeated with a fervour which was quite justified by the facts, for the money had been lent on conditions so extremely easy that it was practically a gift. What, however, had particularly touched Johnnie's heart was his benefactor's voluntary pledge of secrecy. "He's a queer fellow," continued Johnnie—"Brearley, I mean." Imogen observed with pleasure that he no longer spoke sarcastically of his father's friend. "Usually he's as soft

as putty, and then all of a sudden he'll be as hard as nails. All weak people are like that," he explained, while Imogen admired his grasp of psychology. "They fly to one extreme because they know they've overdone the other. No moderation. Unstable of purpose. Moody. Like me," he concluded unexpectedly, looking at her with one of his brilliant smiles. Imogen was silent; this pathetic self-knowledge struck her painfully. "You can take it from me that Brearley's a thoroughly decent chap," repeated Johnnie with emphasis. "I feel as though I'd been reprieved from hanging. I shall pay off my old hag the minute I get in, and feel alive again." He drew in a great breath of fresh air, as though he had really just been released from prison, and scanned the blue sky with exhilaration. "It's a glorious morning!" he cried enthusiastically.

Imogen, looking about her, perceived a rolling mass of grey cloud slowly climbing the sky behind them, but she did not wish to dim Johnnie's joy, and walked on in silence.

"I remember once," began Johnnie suddenly in quite a different tone, "reading a story by Tchekoff about some young man who had done something rather awful, and there was a family council to discuss it. All through the row he simply felt defiant and rebellious, and thought they were making a stupid fuss about nothing, but in the end they forgave him, and immediately he began to see that he'd done wrong. Well, Tchekoff knew what he was talking about. I feel like that."

"Oh, Johnnie!" protested Imogen, "you've haven't done anything very awful."

"Well——" said Johnnie gloomily. He waved that aside. "I only don't want you to think, Imogen, that I'm not sorry, because I am. I know I've been horrible to you while this row has been on."

"Don't let's talk about it any more," said Imogen, to whom

all this was very painful. "Are you coming up to Royd Bank to-night? Luke will be in."

"Yes, I dare say I shall come up," said Johnnie rather less lugubriously. "Walk along a little way with me towards Daisy Street, Imogen," he pleaded. "I haven't had a proper talk with you for ages; it's been nothing but money and motor-cycles for weeks."

Imogen smiled and consented, and they turned down towards Denbridge Hill.

"Thornton seems awfully keen to know Luke," resumed Johnnie presently. "He asked me again this morning to bring him up some time."

"He takes an interest in Luke because he's your friend, I suppose," remarked Imogen.

"H'm. I doubt it," said Johnnie, who had now quite recovered his normal tone. "He's a queer customer, is the great Brearley. So is his revered mamma. So is his young sister. I suppose I shall be obliged to take old Luke up to High Roebuck some time, though it won't be much of a picnic for him. But look here," he continued rather argumentatively, "when is Luke going to take me over to Leeds to see his place of toil? He promised he would, weeks ago, but it's never come off yet."

Imogen had a momentary pang; she had noticed the delay—so unlike her brother—in Luke's fulfilment of his promise, and had felt that somehow or other, in some subterranean way, it was due to Mrs. Armitage, and was part of her mother's changed policy towards Luke's friend.

"I dare say there are a great many difficulties in front of us, Johnnie," she said quietly, with only apparent irrelevance. "But we shall win through if we are loyal to each other, shan't we?"

Johnnie turned towards her and with sparkling eyes gave her a very lover-like response. Immediately they both forgot

money, motor-cycles, Brearley Thornton, Mrs. Armitage, Luke, and the surrounding Hudley scenery; they flew off into an exquisite dreamland of their own, in which such passing objects as brown cart-horses and brick garages took on a kind of tender, amusing lovableness which their real prototypes quite lacked. The very gradient of Denbridge Hill was a physical delight to the lovers, and the lamp-post at the end of Daisy Street seemed to spread its short arms benevolently above their heads, as if it were a character in an allegorical play and would shortly make its kindly sentiments known to them. So absorbed were they in their love's young dream that they failed to perceive the rapid advance of the grey clouds, until with a sharp hiss a shower suddenly began to throw itself vigorously to earth. Imogen looked about for a tram, but there was none in sight.

"You'd better come and shelter in my humble home till a tram appears," urged Johnnie, unfurling her umbrella. "You can see the tram coming up the hill from the bay-window of my parlour—at least, half of it is mine; the other half belongs to a very reputable young gentleman in the civil service. You can inspect the aspidistras—we have some fine specimens." At this moment the shower became a deluge. "Oh, run!" cried Johnnie, seizing her wrist, and Imogen obediently ran.

Laughing and bumping against each other they fled along Daisy Street hand in hand, and found themselves, wet and breathless, in Johnnie's parlour. Imogen shook a few raindrops from her coat, then seated herself in an arm-chair by the small fire and looked curiously about her at this place where Johnnie lived. Luke, of course, had often visited it, but had not been particularly detailed in his descriptions, merely saying that it was like the ordinary run of lodgings, or perhaps a trifle better. It was a clean, stiff, colourless little room; dim drab furniture abounded, and aspidistras,

as Johnnie said, flourished *passim*. The air felt cold but stagnant, and the table had been partially set for the next meal ever since the conclusion of the last one. Nevertheless Imogen knew that she could be very happy in just such a modest refuge, and so, she was sure, could Luke; while to Johnnie and Mrs. Armitage, on the other hand, the place would be a continually increasing exasperation. Strange how people's dispositions varied! She quite understood now why Johnnie was always wanting to rush away from Daisy Street to the light and colour of theatres and dances and expensive amusements of that kind; her sympathetic love for him was deepened, and her heart filled with compassion, because he had to live in a place which obviously depressed him so terribly. Poor Johnnie!

Just at the moment, as it chanced, Johnnie did not seem particularly depressed, for he hummed blithely as he took off his mackintosh and put the music-case by the hearth to dry. He seated himself on the arm of Imogen's chair and kissed her, then stretched out his hand to take a time-table from the mantel-piece and, one arm round Imogen's waist, proceeded to look up the Denbridge trams. Imogen, taking off her hat, rested her head against his shoulder and assisted him with advice. Outside the rain continued to pour down viciously; Johnnie drew Imogen closer till his lips again rested on her cheek.

From this attitude of intimacy they were abruptly startled by the entrance of the woman of the house, who put down the tray she was carrying with an angry thump which made the glasses on it rattle, and turned a flushed face to the lovers. Far from being the "old hag" Johnnie had indicated, she was a small pinched widow in the fifties, with the remains of a neat figure and a fair complexion; she was aggressive, short-sighted, superior, honest, and just now obviously very much annoyed with Johnnie.

"What is it, Mrs. Womersley?" demanded Johnnie with a lofty air, rising and standing with his back to the fire.

"I didn't know you were in, Mr. Talland," she replied stiffly, peering at Imogen, whose face was hidden in the shadow of the chair. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure. There's a letter for you." She threw it down angrily on the table, and with another inimical glare at Imogen, left the room, closing the door sharply behind her.

Johnnie made a disrespectful *moue* at the vibrating door, smiled reassuringly at Imogen, and took up his letter, which he turned about curiously in his hand.

"Who is it from?" demanded Imogen with a little air of command, as though Johnnie's belongings were *ipso facto* hers. She smoothed her hair and put on her hat again.

"I don't know," said Johnnie, smiling at her tone, which he perfectly understood. "It's redirected in my father's writing." He took the letter to the light to inspect its two postmarks, and Imogen rose and followed him.

"It's in a very uneducated hand," she said, looking over his arm. "The original address, I mean."

"Do you think so?" said Johnnie, apparently much struck. "I suppose it is."

"Oh!" exclaimed Imogen suddenly, catching sight of a tram toiling painfully up the hill towards them. "Look! I must go."

Johnnie stuffed the letter hastily in his pocket, kissed Imogen's cheek and picked up the music-case, and the two made a hurried exit into the rain without, which was still coming down as fast as ever. They reached the end of Daisy Street simultaneously with the tram; with a hasty farewell Imogen mounted it, and was borne slowly upwards. When she had found a seat and paid her fare she looked down the hill, and was surprised to see Johnnie still standing where she had left him in the drenching rain. He had opened the

letter, and was gazing down at the sheet he held in his hand as if transfixed by its contents. Imogen felt vaguely uneasy, and turned away with a sigh.

Indeed, the more she thought about her visit to Daisy Street the more dissatisfied she felt with it. It struck her that Mrs. Womersley had not spoken the truth when she proclaimed her ignorance of Johnnie's presence in the house. She had probably heard their voices in the hall, as they came in, well enough, and had made the letter a pretext for inspecting Johnnie's guest, of whom she obviously disapproved. With what a hostile glance she had looked at Imogen, as if she were astonished to see the girl there, as if, indeed, the girl had no right to be there at all! Of course, Imogen reflected, it was natural that anything which Johnnie did should displease his landlady in the present circumstances—which, thanks to Brearley Thornton, would soon be changed. Suddenly she remembered that Mrs. Armitage and Luke would have been quite as astonished as Mrs. Womersley to see her there, that, indeed, plenty of old-fashioned people would agree with Mrs. Womersley that Imogen had no right to be in Johnnie's rooms at all. A warm colour flooded her cheeks. Really Johnnie must tell Luke at once. She would speak to him about it to-night at Royd Bank, as somehow or other there had been no opportunity this morning. Her spirits lightened as she reflected that now Johnnie's monetary difficulties were over, there was no longer the faintest shadow of a reason to conceal their love.

IV

JOHNNIE did not come to Royd Bank that night, nor the next, nor the next, nor yet the next; he sent no messages either to Imogen or to Luke, nor did he meet Imogen at the station, though she waited there many long cold minutes in the hope that he would turn up after all. Luke was too busy to go down to Daisy Street to make inquiries, though he commented with disappointment on the complete cessation of his friend's visits; and Imogen's days became increasingly filled with perplexity, suspense, and yearning, until at last the world seemed to hold nothing else but these emotions. Her mornings and afternoons consisted simply of waiting for the evenings, when there would be a chance of Johnnie's appearing; and her evenings, when she was at home—and she was loth to leave the house for fear Johnnie should come while she was out—were spent in listening eagerly for his ring at the front-door bell, fluctuating every minute between hope and disappointment, and trying in vain to subdue her restless longing to any occupation. At length, after much anxious musing, she wrote Johnnie a loving little note saying how much she missed him, and posted it secretly, with quiet joy. But even this did not bring him forth, either by letter or in person, and Imogen found that she could not, somehow, do any more. If Johnnie did not respond when she asked him to come to see her she could not urge him a second time; she could only wait in patient silence, though her heart was heavier than she had ever known it before.

More than a week had passed away uneasily like this when at last Mrs. Armitage and Imogen, shopping together

in town in the middle of the morning, came by chance upon Johnnie in the proximity of a High Roebuck tram. He at once excused his absence from Royd Bank—though neither Mrs. Armitage nor Imogen taxed him with it—by saying that he had been ill, really ill, in bed with a temperature. His haggard and feverish appearance as he said this quite bore it out, and Imogen turned upon him a look full of remorse and loving sympathy. Johnnie did not, however, meet her eyes; averting his head, he inquired from Mrs. Armitage how old Luke was getting on and when there would be a chance of their projected Leeds outing coming off.

"I should like to have seen his old laboratories and things," he said wistfully.

"Why not go this afternoon?" suggested Imogen with eagerness. "Friday—it's a good day. You could ring him up."

She gave reasons why Friday was an excellent day for a visit to Leeds, and produced a telephone number by which speech with Luke might, with luck, be secured. Johnnie's gloomy face brightened as she thus made the way smooth with practical advice.

"Personally I think you'd do much better to stay at home and go to bed," drawled Mrs. Armitage coldly. "But if you *do* go, Johnnie, you'd better come back with Luke to Royd Bank and spend the evening with us. It's a long time since we've seen you."

"I think it would do Johnnie good to go," cried Imogen with conviction, feeling intensely happy in the knowledge that Johnnie's neglect of her had been unintentional. "He needs cheering up. Don't you, Johnnie?"

Johnnie, with a rather wan smile, admitted that he did, and after a few more hesitations went across to the post office and telephoned to Luke, while the two Armitages moved on about their errands.

Apparently he had been successful in getting hold of Luke, for when Mrs. Armitage and Imogen returned to Royd Bank that evening from a bazaar they had been attending, they discovered the two boys sitting in front of the dining-room fire waiting for them. Imogen was not so sure, however, that Johnnie's expedition itself had been successful, for the pair did not look particularly lively. Luke was obviously tired and preserved a rather grim silence; while Johnnie, lounging in an arm-chair with one hand in his coat pocket as though he were fingering something, gazed into the fire with a curious expression on his face and was silent too. Imogen wondered whether Johnnie had taken the opportunity of being alone with Luke all the afternoon to tell him that he loved his sister; she surmised that he had done so, and felt sure that she was correct when Luke followed his mother rather purposefully from the room, as if to pass on the news. She turned to Johnnie with a smile, and noticed pityingly how flushed his face was and how deep the lines beneath his eyes—the poor boy was far from well yet. Men never looked after themselves properly; even the sensible Luke neglected obvious precautions: how much more, then, her brilliant erratic Johnnie! He needed care, her care; her thoughts reverted to that image of an early marriage which she had framed during the days of Johnnie's monetary troubles, and consequently she was not surprised when she heard him suddenly pleading in her ear for the same thing. Would Imogen marry him soon, at once, the minute he could get a licence, and go away with him to Canada or America, or some place like that? Imogen smiled and said quietly that she would, and at once her inquiry as to the necessity for exile in a foreign land was stifled by Johnnie's kisses. He seized her arm and drew her down with him until she rested on his knee, then took her roughly to him in a fierce and passionate embrace. Imogen's senses reeled and her will melted; she lay passively in his arms,

her eyes closed, her breast heaving, and returned his kisses in tremulous, ecstatic bliss. A long moment passed. Suddenly the spell was broken by footsteps, which came along the hall and approached the door. In the throbbing silence of the room they sounded loud and fateful.

"That's Jennifer," murmured Imogen faintly, trying to lift her heavy lids. "Let me go." She made an effort to free herself, but was unable to impart sufficient strength to her nerveless limbs to move them. "Let me go," she repeated weakly.

In the nick of time Johnnie released her, and she stumbled ungracefully to her feet, scarcely able to stand. Jennifer was already in the room; she turned a coldly penetrating eye on Imogen's agitated breast and ruffled hair, but made no remark, and began to lay the table for dinner in silence.

"Oh, it's dinner-time!" exclaimed Johnnie with a foolish laugh, staring about him stupidly, his eyes dull and glazed like those of a man in a trance. "Time to eat. Let us eat, drink, and be merry—that's it, isn't it, Jennifer?"

"It depends on how you look at it, Master Johnnie," replied Jennifer stiffly, as Imogen slipped from the room.

"Oh, it's a good text, Jennifer," Johnnie informed her with intense bitterness. "You can take my word for it." He put his hands in his pockets and gazed into the fire, smiling strangely to himself. "Yes," he concluded with relish, "it's a good text."

When, however, the Armitages rejoined him, and the meal began, he seemed to have forgotten these gloomy meditations. He was at his best and most brilliant; his cheeks were flushed, his eyes bright, his wit sparkling; Luke, who began the meal in a somewhat glum and cynical mood, finished it in roars of genial laughter. Afterwards Johnnie made them all play rather absurd card games, which he professed required a tremendous amount of intellect and *finesse;* he in-

vented rules for these games from imaginary manuals written by experts, and reduced the unwilling Mrs. Armitage to helpless laughter by describing a hand of bridge he had once played with the Thorntons. Then at Johnnie's request Imogen sat down at the piano and played Sullivanish songs; Johnnie and Luke stood near by and rendered them with joyous gusto, competing hotly with each other as to who knew the words best or could allot the tunes Imogen played most rapidly to their opera and character. At this amusement Mrs. Armitage made an excellent third. Johnnie sang "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes"; and Luke, not to be outdone, though he had no voice and knew it, insisted on announcing that it was a glorious thing to be a Pirate King, reducing even Imogen to gusts of laughter by the ferocity of his expression and the variety of keys into which he wandered. By this time they were all exhausted with so much laughter, and Mrs. Armitage bade Imogen give them something a little more serious. The girl played a Chopin nocturne. The music danced its delicate, fairy-like, silver path across the air and ceased, and Luke immediately said: "Play some more."

"No, don't, Imogen," Johnnie implored her.

He was quite pale with the intensity of his request, and Imogen understood exactly what he meant; she felt like that herself sometimes when the music was almost too sweet to be borne. She left her position at the piano.

"You don't care for Imogen's music, Johnnie?" observed Mrs. Armitage with a sarcastic inflexion.

"'I am never merry when I hear sweet music,'" quoted Johnnie in a sombre tone.

"Oh, you poets!" drawled Mrs. Armitage. "Luke, move the card-table out again; we'll have some bridge. Johnnie shall play with me to raise his spirits."

Johnnie began the game on a subdued note, but soon his astonishing success cheered him. All the cards ran his way,

and whatever audacity he ventured came off triumphantly; so that Mrs. Armitage abounded in pleased exclamations of wonder. Imogen preferred Johnnie's happiness to her own, any day of the week; and as Luke was a good loser the harmony of the four was undisturbed until the final reckoning of the score, when Johnnie, flushed with triumph, announced gaily that if they had been playing for a pound a hundred Luke and Imogen would have owed him something like ten pounds. At this Mrs. Armitage rather markedly said nothing, nor did Luke offer any responsive repartee; Johnnie's colour deepened, and he laid down the marker abruptly. Obviously, thought Imogen, he was remembering that unfortunate seventeen shillings; he ought not to be so sensitive, poor boy! At this point Jennifer came in with a tray of light refreshments; and Johnnie became extremely lively again over the narration of several good drinking stories, some of which verged on the improper. Mrs. Armitage enjoyed these heartily, expressing condemnation of them for Imogen's sake, but not seriously enough to damp her guest's communicative ardour. It was past midnight when at length Johnnie, declining Luke's company to Daisy Street, took himself down the Royd Bank path alone, whistling cheerfully, in spite of the heavy sleety rain, one of the airs they had sung together earlier in the evening.

Altogether it had been a tremendously jolly evening, and Imogen slept happily and soundly on it through the small hours. She woke up, then, with a little start, to the remembrance that she had been seriously annoyed when Jennifer had broken in upon herself and Johnnie—first Mrs. Womersley, and now Jennifer; really it was too vulgar! It all sprang from the stupid fact that the engagement between herself and Johnnie was not known to anyone beside themselves—unless, indeed, Johnnie had remedied this by telling Luke of it yester-

day afternoon. Had he done so? Imogen was obliged to admit that she was not sure. How stupid of her not to have found out for certain last night! Somehow there never seemed to be an opportunity to ask Johnnie a rather awkward question like that. Imogen considered all these things carefully for a while, her eyes wide open in the darkness, and then decided that Luke and Mrs. Armitage should be told that very day, come what might. There were some things her pride could not endure, even from Johnnie. She smiled gleefully to herself at the thought of herself rebelling against Johnnie—how amused Johnnie would be at the notion!—then closed her eyes and drifted quietly off to sleep again.

It was of this decision that Imogen was thinking next morning as, protected by a check apron and gloves, she conscientiously dusted the Royd Bank drawing-room. Mrs. Armitage, who was an excellent cook, though she pretended to hate the culinary art, was in the kitchen making preparations for the entertainment of some friends that evening to dinner and bridge. As Imogen disposed of Johnnie's cigarette ends, or ran her duster chromatically down the keys of the piano, she reflected that she had already allowed several hours of the day to pass without making her announcement. But it was difficult to bring out a thing like that suddenly at breakfast, she thought, with a smile. Besides, Luke had suddenly developed one of the bad colds he occasionally indulged in; he had been very cross and unapproachable at the meal that morning, while his mother had abounded in sound medical advice on the subject of nasal catarrh, which Luke as a budding doctor deeply resented. Still, Luke must be told—Imogen had already decided that it would be easier to begin with Luke. If he were in the dining-room now, alone, she might perhaps go to him and begin.

Just then Luke came into the room, his plain open face

looking rather heavy and troubled; he shut the door behind him, and, advancing to his sister, uttered at once a speech he had evidently prepared beforehand.

"So you've been letting Johnnie fall in love with you, Imogen?"

Johnnie had told him, then! Imogen coloured with pleasure. She completed with meticulous care the dusting of a complicated ornament, smiling to herself the while, and replaced it with accuracy on the table; then, turning a bright face to her brother, she said teasingly: "What makes you think so, my dear?"

"Jennifer," said Luke bluntly.

"Oh!" cried Imogen, deeply wounded, "Jennifer!" She flung away from her brother and began to dust with angry vehemence.

Luke coloured at the reproach in her voice. "She spoke to me this morning," he explained stiffly. "I think she said something to mother about it some time ago, and mother mentioned it to me; but as neither you nor Johnnie said anything I didn't believe it." He paused, and added gently: "I thought you would have been sure to tell me, Imogen."

Imogen said nothing, but continued to dust with averted eyes. Luke seated himself on the arm of a chair and watched her silently. There was a pause. At length Imogen, with her back to her brother, said coldly: "Well?"

"Well," said Luke quietly, "I rather wish you hadn't let Johnnie fall in love with you, that's all."

His continued kindness in putting the matter that way round smote heavily on Imogen's already overburdened heart, and it was with tear-filled eyes and in a quivering voice that she presently demanded: "Why?"

"I don't think that Johnnie is quite all that we—all that I," Luke corrected himself, "have thought him." He hesitated, and added: "For instance, I don't think his job at old Ulla-

thorne's is anything like as good as he makes out. Mother heard about it."

"Do you suppose I don't know that?" cried Imogen with a contempt in which there was some relief. "What difference does that make?"

"Imogen!" exclaimed Luke, appalled by her tone. "He needn't have told lies about it," he persisted after a moment's reflection. "We shouldn't have thought any the worse of him for saying that the salary was a poor one and that he had to live quietly. It's not honest not to pay your way."

Imogen sighed. In spite of Johnnie's precautions, then, some rumour of his financial position had reached Royd Bank. "Well, that's all over now," she said wearily. "You're very hard on poor Johnnie, Luke."

"If you think I like having to admit that my best friend isn't quite straight in money matters," said Luke in a tone which showed that the matter was indeed heartbreaking for him, "I can assure you I don't. He hasn't been straight about you either, Imogen. Why didn't he tell me himself? He's had plenty of opportunities."

At this Imogen turned an angry face to him, and the brother and sister glared at each other for a moment in hostile silence.

"I don't know what you mean about being 'all over now,'" pursued Luke bitterly. "Do you mean there's nothing between you and Johnnie now? You'd have difficulty in making Jennifer believe that—but, of course, I will," he added hastily, "if you tell me so." Still further embittered by Imogen's silent shake of her head, her brother continued: "If you mean his money difficulties, which you seem to know all about, they're very far from being over; he was trying to borrow quite a large sum of money from me only yesterday."

"Yesterday?" cried Imogen, pierced to the heart. "He tried to borrow from you *yesterday?*"

Luke nodded. "Yes, at Leeds," he said. "It was the first I'd heard of his having money troubles at all. You were evidently better informed."

It was Imogen's turn to be appalled. "Oh, Luke!" she faltered, while her mind raced over the vistas of fresh trouble for Johnnie which her brother's words had revealed. "Luke, I think you must have a complex about money," she said, in a piteous attempt to conceal what she was feeling. "You take it so terribly seriously."

Luke seemed much struck by this. "Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "I don't want to be hard on Johnnie, you know," he added wistfully after a moment. "He's my friend, and in spite of all this I shall always like him better than anyone else. Only it's very disappointing."

"We'll talk about it again later," said Imogen, forcing herself to resume her dusting with quiet composure. "Don't stay in this cold room, Luke. When did you arrange to see Johnnie again?"

"I didn't arrange anything," replied Luke. "I wanted to have time to think about the money question. I mentioned it to mother last night."

"Oh, Luke!" said Imogen reproachfully.

"He didn't tell me anything about you, you know," explained Luke. "It was Jennifer who told me about you, this morning before breakfast."

"Jennifer!" exclaimed Imogen again impatiently.

"Well, why did you expose yourself to her comments?" demanded Luke with some heat. "I must say I'm disappointed in you, Imogen."

"Oh!" cried Imogen, stamping her foot in exasperation—she was in an agony of impatience to see her brother go. She altered her voice and added more kindly: "We shall quarrel if we go on with this now, Luke. Do go away from this cold room, and think things over again, and then you'll

see that you're being unfair to Johnnie and unkind to me."

"Unkind to you?" exclaimed Luke in an unwonted flash of temper. "How can you say that, Imogen? For God's sake have some sense! Isn't it on your account that I'm vexed with Johnnie? I spend my whole life trying to look after you, if you care to know."

"Oh, Luke!" said Imogen sorrowfully, "don't let us quarrel about Johnnie when we're both so fond of him." Misunderstanding Luke's impatient exclamation, she persisted: "You know you *are* fond of him, Luke. Do go back to the dining-room fire; it's too cold for you in here." As her exasperated brother stalked towards the door she enquired timidly: "Did you offer to lend Johnnie the money?"

"No!" flung out Luke, with emphasis, from the threshold. "I did not."

His look was so grim that Imogen forbore to ask him whether he meant to try to oblige Johnnie in the near future, and her brother passed out of the room without any further remark.

The moment the dining-room door had closed behind him Imogen ran swiftly and noiselessly upstairs and put on her outdoor clothes; she then, without informing anyone of her intention, left the house and hurried towards Daisy Street, her heart full of foreboding and anxious care. What fresh disaster had fallen upon Johnnie in the week's interval, of such magnitude as to make him actually not reluctant to let Luke into the secret of his difficulties? Or was it, perhaps—Imogen's heart sank—not a fresh disaster, but merely an old one unconfessed? As she almost ran down Denbridge Hill it struck her that Johnnie would probably not be at home; at this time of the morning he should be working for old Ullathorne. In that case she would leave a note bidding him, in the strongest terms, come up to Royd Bank as soon as he received it.

As, however, she mounted the steps of Johnnie's house she saw him; he was standing in the little bay-window, with his hands in his pockets, staring fixedly out at the house opposite. Much relieved, Imogen gave a friendly little tap on the window—a tap to which Johnnie's answering start was out of all proportion—and when his attention was thus attracted waved cheerfully to him. Johnnie seemed extremely agitated; he threw up the side window and bade her wait and he would come out to her; she was not to ring the bell. Somewhat nonplussed, Imogen obeyed and waited passively on the little steps, and in a moment Johnnie opened the door and stepped across the threshold. He looked white and wild, and as he caught her hand she felt even through her glove that his skin was burning. Her heart sank.

"Don't come in," he said hurriedly, almost thrusting her away from the door.

"Why not?" inquired Imogen, taken aback.

"Mrs. Womersley didn't like it when you came before," explained Johnnie in a feverish undertone. "I'll get my hat—you walk along to the end—I'll overtake you."

With burning cheeks Imogen obeyed, but she was not pleased, and when Johnnie caught her up she said indignantly: "What do you mean about Mrs. Womersley? What has she to do with it?"

"Oh, Imogen, don't bother me about such trifles!" cried Johnnie, throwing his hands out with a restless movement. "Can't you see I'm worried to death already?"

"Yes, that's what I've come about," said Imogen, waiving her personal grievance. "Luke told me——"

A groan rose to Johnnie's lips.

"We can't talk here," he said quickly, as a lorry thundered past them up the hill. "The noise drives me nearly distracted." He put his hands to his temples with an air of distress and harassment which went to Imogen's heart. "I'll

come up to Royd Bank to-night," he added, stopping abruptly and looking at the girl from dilated, almost squinting eyes like those of a tortured animal. "No use trying to talk here."

"But we must talk here if we can't go back to Daisy Street," insisted Imogen.

"Imogen!" cried Johnnie wildly, throwing out his hands again. "Don't madden me."

"We can go into the road below Denbridge wood," suggested Imogen hastily, frightened by his strange look. "It will be quiet there. Come along." With an encouraging smile at him she began to walk briskly down Denbridge Hill, and Johnnie followed, keeping a few steps in her rear like a docile but perplexed and reluctant child.

They reached the foot of the hill, and turned off the busy main thoroughfare into a quieter road lined on one side by a scrubby little hillside wood and on the other by the Denbridge canal. Even there, however, they could not find the peace and quietude which Johnnie so sorely needed; just round the corner the surface of the road was being repaired: a steam roller jolted crunchingly back and forth, and a host of workmen wielded picks and shovels. Johnnie exclaimed and started nervously back when he saw these activities, and Imogen could not persuade him to pass them. The lovers therefore paced rapidly up and down the short length of road where they could enjoy comparative silence, and Imogen put her hand within Johnnie's arm, and began to try to coax him into telling her his new trouble. For a long time, though he clung to her hand, he resisted her artless blandishments and seemed to be much distressed by them.

"So Luke told you I tried to borrow from him?" he repeated from time to time, interrupting Imogen's gentle pleadings.

"Yes, he told me," replied Imogen calmly. She tried to imply by her tone that the whole transaction was perfectly natural and need not worry him, but she dreaded lest he

should ask what Luke thought of it. Often this question seemed to be trembling on his lips, but each time, for some reason—perhaps he feared the answer—he refrained from putting it.

"But is it some new trouble, or one that you had—overlooked—before?" Imogen urged him gently.

"That's it, that's it!" exclaimed Johnnie, catching eagerly at the word. "It's one I'd overlooked. That's what makes it so awkward, you see."

"Oh, I don't see why it should," said Imogen soothingly. "Won't you tell me exactly what it is? Then I should be better able to judge."

"Well——" began Johnnie. He hesitated, and then, looking down at the muddy surface of the road, began: "You remember that letter which came for me the morning you came to Daisy Street? Well, it was from Loughmore—where that school was, you know." He hesitated again, and continued jerkily: "It was for some money—that I'd forgotten about. It was rather important, so—in the end—I sent them the money Brearley lent me."

"Do you mean Mrs. Womersley's money?" cried Imogen, aghast.

Johnnie flushed and looked accusingly at her.

"You don't understand how important the Loughmore thing was," he cried in an angry tone. "I sent the money off to them at once, and they wrote wanting some more, and I told them I hadn't any more, and yesterday they sent a letter threatening legal proceedings. So you see," he concluded almost triumphantly, "it was much more important than old Madam Womersley."

"It seems a very strange thing to me," said Imogen with some indignation. "I don't understand it. Do you really owe the Loughmore people *more* than Brearley lent you? It seemed such a lot of money."

"I don't exactly owe it them," hesitated Johnnie.

"Show me the letters," demanded Imogen.

"I've burnt them," replied Johnnie instantly.

"Oh, Johnnie!" sighed Imogen. "You are really so *very* unpractical, dear. However, it's no use bothering about that now. We must decide what you're to do to get all this worry finished. I think you ought to write to Mr. Talland."

"I *can't,*" protested the unfortunate Johnnie—"I simply can't, Imogen."

"But what else are you to do?" argued Imogen rather wearily. "You can't very well borrow from Brearley Thornton, you know, after what's happened with his last money."

"I know that as well as you do," said Johnnie loftily. He was silent for a minute, then burst out: "Curse them all!"

"Who?" quavered Imogen, beginning to feel frightened and helpless.

"All these people," cried Johnnie furiously, waving his hand to indicate the many large mills which dotted the valley and the surrounding hillsides. "There are hundreds and thousands of rich manufacturers in the West Riding who could set me straight and never feel it, but would they do it? Not likely! I asked"—he hesitated, then went on: "I asked one only yesterday, and what do you think he said? He said: 'It takes me all my time to find the money for my weekly wages bill, never name pay for your goings-on.' That's what he said, and he's a rich man with a large house and two motor-cars—two!" 'It takes me all my time,'" repeated Johnnie, mimicking a Yorkshire accent, "'to find the money for my weekly wages bill.' Hound!"

"Who said that to you?" demanded Imogen, sympathetically indignant.

Johnnie muttered angrily and kicked at a stone, and Imogen repeated: "Who? Who was it?" Johnnie looked up, rather flushed, and murmured "old Ullathorne."

"The horrid old brute!" exclaimed Imogen with youthful conviction.

"That's what he said," repeated Johnnie excitedly. "'It takes me all my time to find the money for my weekly wages bill.' That's what he said, and he's a rich man with two motor-cars—two!"

"Well, never mind," said Imogen soothingly, alarmed by his vehemence.

"But I can't help minding!" cried Johnnie, turning his wild young face to her. "It's got on my nerves. I couldn't sleep for it. I shall never forget his horrible, uneducated, Yorkshire voice saying it, never. And he has two motor-cars—two! It's almost enough to make a fellow turn Socialist, like Luke."

"Oh, Johnnie!" cried Imogen, alarmed at the amount of mental disturbance in her lover which this implied, for the political difference between Luke and Johnnie was definite and old-established. "Don't say that!" At the bottom of her heart she thought that Luke would not be particularly pleased by this change of front at such a moment. "You don't mean it," she added soothingly.

"Don't I?" said Johnnie savagely. "You don't know what I mean."

It was obvious that he himself did not know either, and Imogen became convinced of her incapacity to handle the situation.

"I'll fetch Luke," she said. "I'm sure he didn't understand yesterday how serious it was. Luke's very sensible—he'll be able to advise you whether to write to Mr. Talland or to tell mother, or perhaps even after all to ask Brearley Thornton again." (Johnnie winced.) "We must have somebody *older* than ourselves, Johnnie. There's Mr. Jackson, father's partner, you know; I'm sure he'll be able to deal with those Loughmore people. But the first thing is to tell Luke—tell him all

about it properly, I mean. Will you come up to Royd Bank now with me?"

"No, no!" cried Johnnie hastily. "Of course I won't. What would Mrs. Armitage think?" he added as an afterthought.

"Well, shall I go home and fetch Luke, and bring him down to Daisy Street?" urged Imogen.

"What's the good of telling Luke?" muttered Johnnie, turning very pale.

"Yes, yes!" insisted Imogen, hurrying him off towards Denbridge Hill. "You *must* tell Luke; he's very sensible, and he's very, very fond of you, Johnnie. I could see that this morning, although he pretended to be annoyed."

"I don't want to tell Luke all about it," said Johnnie pitifully, his young face haggard and contorted.

"But he knows so much of it already," urged Imogen in a soothing tone. "He knows that you haven't got a very good post at Mr. Ullathorne's, for instance, and he knows that you need that big sum of money. And he knows about you and me," she added simply.

Johnnie gave a sharp cry and hung back.

"I don't want to tell Luke," he repeated in a thin childish voice of extreme distress.

"You worry too much about it," Imogen soothed him. "After all, you haven't done anything really wrong, you know, dear. It can soon be made all right. I'll bring Luke to Daisy Street, and you must go back there and wait for us and rest. All this anxiety is making you ill."

"I can't rest," muttered Johnnie.

Comforting, consoling, and reassuring him thus Imogen half urged, half dragged her lover up the steep bank to the end of Daisy Street. In her eagerness to fetch her brother she would have left him there, and boarded the tram which was lumbering up the hill behind them; but she felt con-

vinced that if she did so Johnnie would wander off to anywhere but Daisy Street, in order to evade the interview with Luke, which he seemed to dread so much. She did not leave him, therefore, till the door of Mrs. Womersley's house had closed between them, and then, though she ran along the little street, clean-washed by last night's rain, the tram had passed beyond her reach. Much distressed, for somehow she felt that there was a pressing need for haste, and that she must rejoin Johnnie at the earliest possible moment, she toiled as fast as she could force herself to go up the steep hill, which seemed endless to her. She began to feel as though she were in one of those nightmares where the dreamer strives with all his might and main to escape from some awful disaster which is about to occur, but cannot move his feet from the spot. She found herself moving her lips in frantic admonitions to herself to make haste, to speed on swiftly; her brow was damp, her limbs ached, her breath came in great panting sobs. She strove to argue with herself that a few minutes more or less could not make much difference to Johnnie either way, but she did not believe this reasoning, and hurried on the faster. The painful look of strain on Johnnie's face, the throbbing veins in his temples, his wild wandering glance, the despairing anguish in his broken tones: all these could not be endured by Imogen for a second longer than was absolutely necessary. Poor Johnnie!—poor, poor Johnnie!

Meanwhile Johnnie was standing in the little bay-windowed parlour turning a series of facts and feelings monotonously over and over in his tired brain. Overwhelming all other thoughts in poignant intensity was the reflection that the horrible affair with the Loughmore girl would now have to come out. The letters, of course, had been from her. His first action on entering the house had been to draw them out from his inner pocket and burn them; he did this not because he thought it would be especially to his advantage that they

should be destroyed, but in order to turn one at least of his lies to Imogen that morning into truth. He felt better and cleaner when he had done it, though destroying the letters unfortunately did not mean that the affair was at an end. What an unutterable fool he had been to reply to that first Loughmore letter and send the girl money, thus practically telling her that she had got hold of his correct Cornwall address! Yet how could he, being Johnnie Talland—that is, not a bad fellow at heart—neglect her plea? (Though at the same time he was sure it was a false one, or she would have made it long ago. Her first letter was almost certainly what he called a "try-on"; she had probably just discovered his Cornwall address, or was about to be married and needed the money, or something of that kind, reflected Johnnie, who had a veneer of sophistication which sometimes served him ill and sometimes well.) Let him survey his situation just once again, in case some loophole, some gleam of light in it that he had missed before, might now present itself—not that his head was particularly clear.

To begin with, there was Imogen. Luke now knew about his love for Imogen, so that Mrs. Armitage would soon know, and if Mrs. Armitage knew she would certainly write to Mrs. Talland to know what she thought of it, or expect some communication from Mrs. Talland giving her views. And then the Loughmore business would come out—part of it, at least—for Mr. Talland would insist on its being revealed to Mrs. Armitage, and then Johnnie would probably lose Imogen altogether, and appear a villain to Luke. Of course, if Johnnie had lived a perfectly steady and estimable life since his return to Hudley, Mr. Talland might perhaps—it was not very probable—have been prevailed upon to keep silence about the Loughmore affair to Mrs. Armitage; but then Johnnie had not lived what his father would call a steady and estimable life since his return to Hudley. He owed Mrs. Womersley a

good deal of money, he owed Brearley Thornton a good deal of money, he owed various tradespeople a certain amount of money, and goodness knew how much he would have to pay the Loughmore girl to keep her quiet! The Loughmore girl might write a pathetic note to Mr. Talland, thus exposing the cardinal fact of that affair to his father, and so, now that Luke knew about his love for Imogen, to Mrs. Armitage and her son and daughter. What Johnnie ought to have done, of course —he saw it now—was to have told Luke about himself and Imogen at the very beginning, when Johnnie's difficulties only amounted to a paltry pound or two, and prevailed on Luke—though that was not very probable either—not to tell his mother, so that she would not write to Cornwall about it. Cornwall—it was Jennifer's utterance of that word at the door, that night when he first told Imogen of his love for her, that had suddenly shown Johnnie the horrible Loughmore awkwardness which would occur if the Armitages found out that he wanted to marry Imogen. And now the Armitages had found out. And at this very moment Imogen was bringing Luke to see Johnnie. Johnnie felt literally sick at the thought. Johnnie knew Luke's slow, logical thoroughness well enough, and he knew that Luke would want to know exactly what this Loughmore debt was to which Johnnie had devoted Brearley Thornton's money. If Johnnie did not tell him, Luke would suspect him of something base, and would give him no help, and would keep Imogen from him. And if Johnnie did tell him? He would probably lose Imogen for ever, and in Luke's eyes he would appear a villain.

The awful, terrible, soul-sickening part of it was that Johnnie began to feel that he perhaps *was* a villain. Always before he had imagined that he had been sorely tempted, that circumstances were against him, that if only he were back in dear old Hudley with good old Luke and that nice

little podge Imogen Mary all would be well, and that in any case everybody made mistakes, and his mistakes were going to be stepping-stones to higher things. Always before there had been a slight air of unreality—to Johnnie—about Johnnie's peccadilloes; they had occurred in Plymouth, or in London, or in Loughmore, vague places where nothing mattered and the people didn't count, mere preludes to Johnnie's *real* life, which was to be so brilliant, so successful. But now he was in the Hudley world, the world he loved, the real world; and in this world he had behaved abominably to two real people who mattered, two people whom he deeply loved and for whose especial sakes he desired to be brilliant and successful. He had tried to borrow money from Luke. He had behaved most dishonourably to Imogen. Could he honestly say that when she came to Daisy Street that morning, or when yesterday evening he held her in his arms, she was as perfectly safe with him as Luke would wish? He knew he could not say so, and that was the reason, and not any objections of Mrs. Womersley—he had invented those on the spur of the moment—why he had not allowed Imogen to enter the house that morning. Was he really a low-down, rotten, cadging, weak, unpleasant character, then? He, the brilliant Johnnie Talland! Was he, perhaps, not going to be so successful and wonderful after all? He was terribly afraid that such would prove to be the case. Only that morning he had told Imogen two lies, and implied no end of others, and had shown himself less punctilious than she was on a point of honour. For on receiving the threatening Loughmore note yesterday morning, the very first thing he had done had been to dash off and beg Brearley Thornton for the money, in his distress and need even hinting, in the tone of one man of the world to another, that there was a woman in the case. It was Brearley's refusal, and not old Ullathorne's —old Ullathorne had told Johnnie weeks ago, with brutal

finality, that there was nothing to be gained from him in that line, and that another application would lose him his job—it was Brearley's refusal which had rung in his ears all night and called forth Imogen's indignant sympathy. Imogen had quite rightly assumed that no decent person would think, in the circumstances, of applying to Brearley Thornton for a second loan. Yet Johnnie had done it.

At this point Mrs. Womersley's little daughter, a child with short hair and a gym costume, came into the room to lay the table for the midday meal. Unable to bear her bright face and pert ways, which usually amused him, Johnnie went up to his bedroom, sat down on the creaking little bed, and buried his face in his hands. The slight movement had, however, cheered him and broken the train of his thoughts, and he reflected that one could, of course, take an entirely different view of his escapades; one could—he had done so, yesterday evening—feel that such episodes as the Loughmore one were a perfectly natural and legitimate part of the poetic life. Indeed, as he reflected, many quite sober and unpoetic people behaved like that from the highest principles. But then such people did not conceal such episodes and lie about them as Johnnie had done. Besides, such people usually belonged to a political and social type for which Johnnie had the utmost detestation—unwashed creatures with long hair and no ancestry; he had always felt very superior to them, and jeered at Luke for sharing some of their views, and had not hesitated to let such of them as he had encountered know what he thought of their behaviour.

In the early hours of the morning Johnnie had managed to get a little sleep by deciding that he need not do anything for several days; he need not write to Loughmore just yet; he would avoid Mrs. Womersley and keep away from Royd Bank. Some solution or other would be sure to occur to him meanwhile. Such an attitude was, of course, the height of

weakness; Johnnie knew that and despised himself unutterably for it. Still, that attitude had had certain compensations, and now Imogen, his beautiful Imogen, strong in her love and the purity of her intentions, was forcing action upon him. He looked at his watch: she had been gone more than half an hour; she would be just arriving at Royd Bank and interviewing Luke; in another twenty minutes or so Luke and his sister would reach Daisy Street. At this thought he jumped up and paced about in agony. Looking out of the curtained little window he saw two figures at the end of Daisy Street, which for one sickening moment he imagined to be those of Luke and Imogen. He leaped back from the window with a sharp cry, trembling and in a cold sweat of panic. Looking again, he saw tnat the figures were not those of his friends, were indeed quite grotesquely unlike them; but the mistake had shown him what he would feel when Luke and Imogen really did arrive. "Really"; yes, it was all horribly real; it was really the brilliant Johnnie Talland who sat on this small sordid bed and recognised that he was mean, feeble, base, unreliable, born to make a mess of anything beautiful he touched, a coward, a liar, an individual for whom, once his character was truly known, no decent person could possibly feel love or admiration. A sense of failure surged up and overwhelmed him; with a look of deathly sickness on his face he slid his hand slowly into the pocket of his coat.

At that moment Imogen reached the Royd Bank gate; she made a last effort, ran up the sloping path and burst into the house. Luke was standing in the hall.

"Where have you been?" he demanded in a tone of authority. "I was just coming out to look for you."

"To see Johnnie," said Imogen breathlessly.

"Imogen!" began Luke with a stern face.

"Oh, don't waste time about all that now," cried Imogen,

waving it impatiently away with one hand. "You must come to Johnnie at once, Luke. He's in trouble—real serious trouble. You must come immediately. He's desperate about it; he's almost mad. You must come!"

As she had known he would, Luke responded to this appeal at once and in silence; he took up his hat and left the house. Imogen followed him.

"There's no need for you to come," said her brother, not unkindly, as she caught him up in the path. "Leave it to me —Johnnie will prefer that."

"I must come," replied Imogen briefly. The two exchanged glances, and Luke made no further attempt to prevent her accompanying him.

They walked on for a time in silence, then in response to a question from her brother Imogen began to outline Johnnie's difficulties. Luke listened without comment till she had told him all she knew, when he observed dryly:

"I think I ought to tell you, Imogen, that *we* can't lend Johnnie any money."

"Why not?" demanded Imogen hotly.

"Because we haven't got it to lend," said her brother. "Lending money to friends is a luxury we can't afford."

"What do you mean?" demanded Imogen with scorn. "You always make such a fuss about money, Luke. We must have some, or how do we live?"

"I simply mean," retorted her brother, goaded into plainness, "what I've always tried to keep from you before, that we're probably in debt to tradesmen all over the place."

"Oh!" exclaimed Imogen with intense bitterness. "We're no better than poor Johnnie, then? If that's the case, I don't see why you should adopt such a righteous attitude and condemn him so severely, Luke."

Luke remained silent for a moment, then he burst out: "It's not *my* fault we're in debt."

"You mean it's mother's," stated Imogen coldly.

"Oh, Imogen!" exclaimed Luke, appalled, for the second time that morning, by his sister's tone. He was silent for a while. "To return to the general question," he resumed presently, "I think that the community should only pay out money in proportion to value received, and I don't think either Johnnie or the Armitage family give much value as yet. The world seems to pay rather heavily for the privilege of Johnnie's society, doesn't it?"

Imogen exclaimed impatiently at these abstractions. "He didn't ask to be put in the world, I suppose," she said.

Luke sighed. "You've changed such a lot these last few months, Imogen," he observed sadly.

Tears sprang into Imogen's eyes. "I'm not really different, Luke," she pleaded, averting her face so that he should not see her discomposure.

Luke muttered something incoherent and touched her hand, and, thus reconciled, the brother and sister passed onward on their errand of salvation.

Fields, houses, roads, shops, railings, gardens, and blackened stone walls passed slowly by. It was now noon; buzzers for the conclusion of the week's work were sounding loudly, and workmen, brisk and lively and whistling at the thought of their week-end holiday, filled the streets and crowded the trams. Imogen began to feel more and more depressed; she was sure they were not walking fast enough, though the pace was as quick as she could force her trembling limbs to make it. She now urged Luke to leave her and go on ahead, but he seemed not to wish it; he was perhaps thinking out what he should say to Johnnie when he reached Daisy Street, and had not yet come to any decision. The whole affair was obviously extremely painful and disillusioning to him; he had, as it were, sought a refuge from his bothers with Mrs. Armitage in Johnnie's friendship, and the same

repulsive bothers sprang up and faced him there in an aggravated form.

At length, when Imogen was conscious of nothing but a great weariness, mental and physical, they reached Daisy Street and walked along its sober little causeway. While Luke rang the bell Imogen peered anxiously through the bay-window, but though the table was set for a meal the room was empty; Johnnie was not there. The bell remained unanswered for several minutes. Why did not Johnnie come to the door? Had he, in spite of all she had said, decided not to see Luke, and gone out to avoid him? Her spirit drooped. She urged Luke not to stand upon ceremony, but to turn the handle and go in, and after some hesitation Luke did so, only to be confronted by the spectacle of Mrs. Womersley emerging from the kitchen door at the opposite end of the passage, wiping her hands on her rough sacking apron as she came along. It was characteristic of her type, as Imogen found time to reflect, that she should wash on Saturday to get ahead with her next week's work; and she turned a very disapproving eye upon the disturbers of her busy morning. She glared with particular hostility upon Imogen, but seemed somewhat mollified by the sight of Luke, whom she recognised and called by his name, adding the information that if he wanted Mr. Talland, he had come in about three-quarters of an hour ago. She threw open the dining-room door and expressed surprise at not finding Johnnie within that apartment, for, as she said, his hat and coat rested on the branched mahogany hat-stand which occupied the rear of the hall. Luke thereupon suggested, rather impatiently for Luke, that Johnnie was upstairs, and proposed to fetch him, as he knew, he said, his friend's room; but Mrs. Womersley was not pleased with the thought of a stranger inspecting the arcana of her household at such a comparatively early hour, and went up herself, leaving Luke

and Imogen standing uncomfortably in the hall. Imogen leaned against the banisters for support, for she was really exhausted.

"There's no need for you to wait, Imogen," said Luke with an asperity which concealed real uneasiness. "Please do go."

His sister merely shook her head.

A sharp scream came from above; there was a sound of running feet, and Mrs. Womersley appeared at the head of the stairs, her small pinched face grey and horrified.

"Oh Mr. Armitage, sir!" she exclaimed in panic-stricken tones, looking at Luke beseechingly and coming down a step or two towards him.

With a strange exclamation Luke suddenly ran up the stairs, brushed unceremoniously past her, and vanished into a room on the left. The woman, weeping and shuddering, clung to Imogen and prevented her from following her brother up the stairs.

"What is it? What is it?" cried Imogen in terror, vaguely conscious of some appalling disaster. "Let me go! What is it?"

"Don't go up, lovey, don't you go up," Mrs. Womersley exhorted her. Her small features worked convulsively, and she took a firmer grip of Imogen's arm as the girl tried to break away. The short-haired child, who had evidently been out on an errand, appeared at the kitchen door with a parcel, and looked on wide-eyed at the unusual spectacle. Her presence suddenly made the whole scene grotesque, and Imogen gave up the struggle in disgust, just as Luke reappeared at the top of the stairs—a Luke whom Imogen had never seen before, extremely pale, extremely composed, with an extraordinary look of professional reserve in his eyes.

"Who's the nearest doctor?" he said coldly to the weeping woman; and, when he had received her answer: "Fetch him at once—not that it's any good."

"Oh, what has he done it with, to make himself look like that?" enquired Mrs. Womersley hysterically. "Poor young thing!"

"Carbolic acid," replied Luke, his teeth suddenly chattering. "The bottle's in his hand."

V

"Misfortunes never come singly," observed Mrs. Armitage with languid emphasis to her friends. "Here I have Imogen in bed with influenza, and now Luke is nearly distracted with worries about that unfortunate Talland boy."

The implication of this skilful little speech—that Imogen's illness was entirely separate from and previous to the affair of the unfortunate Talland boy—was what Mrs. Armitage was intensely concerned to impress on her hearers, and she sacrificed with ruthless determination anything which did not tend to support this fiction. Among the things she sacrificed was the regard of the Tallands. She would not, in spite of strong appeals from Luke, which caused a series of angry scenes between mother and son, offer the hospitality of Royd Bank to the Reverend Francis Talland and his wife when they came to Hudley on their mournful errand. To Luke's bitter declaration that he found her behaviour in the highest degree cowardly and disgusting, she simply replied that Imogen's welfare came first with her—Johnnie himself would have wished it so. Imogen must be kept out of the affair at all costs, or her prospects would be ruined.

"Her prospects!" exclaimed Luke, in tones of the bitterest contempt, pacing furiously up and down the room. "It's a good thing Imogen can't hear you." He went on to intimate that there were other things in life, as, for example, honour, friendship, and common decency, which came before even Imogen's prospects.

"Not for me," replied Mrs. Armitage calmly at this, with

her frigid smile, and she persisted in her refusal to have the Tallands at Royd Bank.

The bereaved pair refused the shelter offered by the Thorntons on the score of distance, and finally accommodated themselves in the cold civility of a town hotel.

At first Mrs. Armitage had aimed at keeping the name of Armitage entirely out of the unfortunate Talland case, but when she found that this could not be done, that Luke would have to give evidence at the inquest—evidence of finding Johnnie's body, evidence that he had had access to carbolic acid the day before at Leeds (this latter item was a terrible blow to Mrs. Armitage)—she deliberately sacrificed Luke, cut him out of the family, as it were, in order to preserve Imogen's position intact. Her public attitude was that Luke had had a casual friendship with the Talland boy, of which she, of course, knew, but strongly disapproved. Nobody would ever have imagined, to hear her frank admissions of Luke's unfortunate friendliness with the dead boy, that Johnnie had been in the habit of visiting Royd Bank two or three times a week for the last three months. To these extremes she was driven by one awful half-hour when Luke had broached to her the possibility that Imogen's evidence, on the point of Johnnie's state of mind—she being the last person to see him alive except the child Womersley—would be required. For a few minutes, during which Mrs. Armitage's hair seemed visibly to whiten and her features to sink into the hollows of old age, she sat dumbfounded; then she rallied, and made it absolutely clear to Luke that Imogen must not under any consideration be connected with the Talland case in any way whatever. Who, besides Imogen and himself, knew, as Mrs. Armitage pointed out, that Imogen had seen Johnnie that morning? Imogen was in bed and knew nothing of what was happening, and Luke was to hold his tongue; with a friendly coroner and a word to Mrs.

Womersley, who would not be at all anxious to have a girl dragged into the case and suspicion aroused that her respectable little house was the scene of "goings-on," Imogen's name need never be mentioned in the case at all. Mrs. Armitage commanded Luke's acceptance of this principle in the strongest terms, and after some hesitation the perplexed Luke acquiesced. This keeping out of Imogen became a positive mania with Mrs. Armitage; when her son came home, tired and inexpressibly saddened by the wretched formalities which were all that was left of his boyhood's great friendship, Mrs. Armitage plied him with anxious questions as to the likelihood of Imogen's being drawn into the case or discussed in the town in connection with Johnnie; and she criticised all Luke's actions from this point of view.

At times Luke in his unhappiness turned angrily on her, pointed out the absurdity of her behaviour, since everybody had seen the three young people out together that winter, and asked why, if she had such an objection to Imogen's being thought to have known Johnnie, she had allowed the love-affair between the two to continue after her first warning of it from Jennifer.

"Why didn't you stop it at the beginning instead of waiting till he's dead?" he would ask sarcastically.

"Because, my dear boy," Mrs. Armitage replied, with a weary air of explaining something perfectly obvious, "that would simply have made the whole thing public and thrown Imogen into Johnnie's arms."

"She was there already," commented Luke bitterly.

"Don't be vulgar, Luke," said his mother in an acid drawl. "Allow me to know what is best for Imogen. Imogen is a girl of spirit, and not a ninny, as you seem to imagine. These boy and girl affairs usually mean nothing, and come to nothing if they are left alone. It doesn't harm a girl in the world's eyes to have a boyish admirer or two. Besides, at first I didn't

realise how unsuitable he was for Imogen; I thought he had quite a good position with Mr. Ullathorne." At Luke's exclamation of disgust she carried the war into his own country: "How *you* can have spent so many hours every week with that boy, and not discovered that he was mad," she said, "is what passes *my* comprehension."

"He wasn't mad!" cried the tormented Luke.

"Then why did he kill himself?" demanded Mrs. Armitage with an air of triumphant logic; and a long argument began between mother and son, full of bitter recriminations which echoed with a wearisome monotony in the corners of the darkened room upstairs where Imogen lay the day through, quiet and uncomplaining, her pale cheeks wet with silent tears. Mrs. Armitage, who was not usually given to poetical images, thought that she looked like a broken flower; and Luke was intensely distressed by his sister's brooding stillness. It formed too startling a contrast with those first moments of wild shuddering anguish, of terrible heartbreak, when Imogen madly wrung her hands and besought her brother over and over again, in a piercing cry of agony which would ring in Luke's ears, he felt assured, till his life's end, to tell her for pity's sake that it was not true, that it was all a stupid mistake: Johnnie was not, could not really be dead. Luke suffered quite as much as his mother from a sense of the tragedy which had come upon Imogen's life, but as usual the two differed entirely in the conduct they thought proper to the occasion.

To Mrs. Armitage's question as to the reason for Johnnie's death nobody could give a very satisfactory reply. The Loughmore letters being destroyed—no more came, so that Johnnie's suspicion of their sincerity was justified—and his love for Imogen concealed, there remained to account for his despair only his money problem as revealed by Mrs. Womersley. As no one but himself knew that Brearley Thornton had any-

thing to do with the case, his evidence was not called; and as Thornton had no desire whatever to add to old Mr. Talland's pain by revealing what he knew of Johnnie's difficulties, and was alarmed by the very name of police proceedings, he did not elect to be mixed up in them, though he attended the inquest. In spite, or perhaps because, of this reserve there were vague rumours of debts and borrowings, but to mature West Riding minds the sum involved seemed so comparatively small that they could not believe Johnnie had thrown away his life for such a trifle. Mr. Talland, who looked very strained and wild—indeed, his appearance lent colour to the doubt of Johnnie's sanity—threw out a few obscure, feverish hints about "remorse," which to Luke's rage sent another set of rumours floating about the town; but, on the whole, public opinion endorsed the jury's verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind. From the sentimental point of view, too, Hudley was glad that the boy—a clergyman's son—could now be buried in consecrated ground without any fuss or scruple.

This was done in Hudley, with all the correct accompaniments of wreaths and complimentary carriages, on a bitterly cold day towards the end of January. Flakes of snow whirled about Mr. Talland's bent shoulders and danced before his burning eyes as he read the service in a terrible hoarse voice of grief and denunication. Those who attended the ceremony out of respect for the old vicar of St. Mark's agreed in thinking that Mrs. Talland would soon follow her son—it had killed her, poor thing, and no wonder. It was rumoured, too, that she had passionately desired to take Johnnie's body back to Cornwall for interment, but had been overruled by her husband. Mrs. Armitage sent a wreath, but declined to go to the funeral; and when Luke proposed that Imogen should be told of the event her contemptuous fury was so outspoken that Luke left the house in anger without visiting his sister's room. It was not till a week or so later that Mrs. Armitage

ventured to break this piece of news to her daughter. Imogen immediately rose and, though she could hardly stand, dressed and demanded to be taken at once to the cemetery. To soothe her Luke was obliged to comply, and he admitted to his mother, on their return, that she had been right not to speak of the funeral to Imogen on the day when it took place.

As it chanced Mrs. Armitage's precautions had a large measure of success; the onus of the Talland affair fell mainly on Luke's shoulders—not a very good beginning for a would-be doctor, was Hudley's comment—and Mrs. Armitage was commiserated, as she desired to be, for having two separate troubles on her hands.

BOOK II

MISS HOAD

I

After a month or so in her room and a few weeks' rather dreary sojourn at the seaside with Mrs. Armitage, Imogen was able to return to her normal life and take up the threads of her various occupations again. She ate, read, slept, walked about Hudley, accepted and gave hospitality, took her share in conversations, and played bridge, all in a manner which offered no ground for public comment. (The only occupation she did not resume was her music; she declined to continue her lessons, and very rarely opened the piano at all.) But it was not, as Luke repeated to his mother till it wore on her nerves, the same Imogen as the one who had done these things before Johnnie's suicide. There was a look of patient suffering on her pale face, and her eyes had the sunken appearance which comes from much weeping, though no one now ever saw her shed tears. She was not irritable or strange, but she did everything with a kind of resigned apathy, an uninterested docility, which was very different from her former warm and eager willingness. She shrank from society, but when she was obliged to enter it her manner was smooth, quiet, and reserved, altogether colder and more mature than it had been before her tragedy. In conversation she made the correct replies with a glib, polished little air which served to conceal her weariness and distaste. At home she rarely spoke unless she was directly addressed, but she sometimes came out with some rather mocking little joke of a cynical turn. This distressed Luke greatly, and he was also distressed by his sister's—as yet only slight—lapse into self-indulgence. In

the old days Imogen had been rather of a grave, Spartan turn —he had often teased her about this trait, which, in fact, was one of the things he most loved and admired in her. But now she rose late, and spent hours crouched by the fire in brooding silence; if Mrs. Armitage asked her to perform some slight service, she left her comfortable chair obediently but without the least alacrity—everything seemed to be a weariness to her. Luke comforted himself with thinking that this apathy would pass when her health was restored; but it did not seem to pass. The winter became a cold, dreary spring, and spring turned into a wet and miserable summer—or so it seemed to Luke—and Imogen still remained grief-stricken, listless, and brooding.

Indeed, the mainspring of her life was broken. The world was utterly changed for her; before Johnnie's death it had seemed a fair and kindly place, a splendid tourney-ground, as it were, where the forces of good waged a noble and ultimately victorious strife against the black and misshapen powers of evil. Now it looked a dark and dangerous scrimmage, in which harmless, lovable people like Johnnie sometimes got trampled underfoot. Imogen shrank from the scrimmage with all her heart; she hated to have to face it afresh with each returning day, and postponed the unpleasant moment as long as possible; her forced smile, her polite insincerity, her weary glibness, she donned as armour when she ventured forth into this scrimmage which her soul loathed. She was still too perplexed, too bewildered, too numbed by the blow, to argue out with herself the contributing factors of Johnnie's death; she only knew that by some extraordinary twist of Fate, some ruling of Providence which she could never hope to understand, and which she resented more fiercely with every day that passed, it was she who had put the fatal potion within Johnnie's reach. It was she who had suggested to Johnnie that he should go to

Leeds that fatal day; it was she who had smoothed over all the practical difficulties of his going; it was she, in fact, who had urged him on an expedition which had led straight to carbolic acid. She knew Johnnie well enough to feel certain that he would never have killed himself if he had not had the means to do it within easy reach, and it was she who had put them there. She knew also that she hated those unknown Loughmore people and old Ullathorne with a strong, bitter, and unrelenting hate, and that this hate made a kind of cold, insensitive spot in her heart. It was her resentment against Fate for that sardonic trick it had played her about the poison, and her hatred of old Ullathorne, which produced those cynical little jokes which hurt poor Luke so, and made Imogen sometimes lazy in fulfilling her mother's requests.

Imogen was particularly sorry that she was not always as nice to her mother as she meant to be, for Mrs. Armitage was really a subject for compassion nowadays. She had emerged from the Talland case somehow physically and spiritually diminished; her fine profile had grown sharper and her voice more peevish; her quarrels with Luke became more frequent than ever and much less dignified, in that the quality of her repartee had deteriorated sadly. Luke unfortunately again failed to pass his examination, and his failure still further embittered his mother. The money situation, too, became, according to Mrs. Armitage, progressively more difficult; she dilated endlessly on the expense of Imogen's illness, speaking as though Johnnie had died on purpose to embarrass her balance sheet; and one might have thought from some of her remarks that Luke was a son whose extravagance she had remonstrated with for years. A summer holiday, as she lamented throughout the whole of July and August, was quite impossible, for reasons which she gave with maddening repetition. All these sordid details were, of course, part of that ignoble scrimmage which Imogen so

detested, and the discussion of money troubles was by association particularly odious to her; she relapsed still further into silent apathy, and a settled sadness seemed to brood in her dark eyes. To Luke's extreme dismay he began to notice that his sister's beautiful hair was often rough and her clothes untidy and ill-chosen. The family doctor, who came in from time to time and felt Imogen's pulse without any appearance of satisfaction, urged peremptorily that she must be "roused," and Mrs. Armitage and Luke agreed with him wholeheartedly; the difficulty was to know how it could be done. The doctor, who knew the truth more or less about Imogen's case, suggested work of some kind as a well-tried panacea for sorrow; and Luke, after some cogitation, brought this down to a proposal, which he made one Sunday afternoon over tea, that Imogen should go in for a course of something useful—shorthand or typewriting or something of that kind; so many girls went in for that sort of thing nowadays. Imogen looked startled for a moment, but then said with the weary docility which Luke found so heartbreaking, "Very well; I don't mind."

"But I do. Imogen is *not* going to do that kind of thing in Hudley, Luke!" cried Mrs. Armitage, flushing angrily. "That would really be the last straw."

Luke muttered something about "futile snobbery," and one of the usual arguments ensued between mother and son, to which Imogen listened in passive silence—she did not nowadays attempt to reconcile the combatants with her tears. As usual, Mrs. Armitage emerged from the altercation victorious.

"Well, let her do it in Bradford, then!" exclaimed Luke at length in contempt.

"Why Bradford, Luke?" demanded Mrs. Armitage in a triumphant drawl.

Luke scowled meaningly at his mother, and Mrs. Armi-

tage seemed to admit by her silence that she had understood the motive of his suggestion. Imogen understood it too; she knew that Luke had suggested Bradford because it lay on the opposite side of Hudley from Denbridge and Daisy Street. She smiled rather bitterly to herself at her brother's mistake in imagining that journeys to and from Bradford were not associated in her mind with Johnnie, and wondered whether to enlighten him on the point. She decided not to do so, however; it did not seem worth while. Very few things seemed worth while to Imogen since Johnnie's death.

During the next few weeks Luke constantly pressed the Bradford scheme on his mother, and a long contest went on, of which Imogen, though appealed to by both sides, remained merely a passive spectator. She did not care one way or the other, she said. Luke found an unexpected ally in Jennifer, who gave it as her opinion that work was the only cure for grief; and he also made good use of his mother's previous lamentations on the money question.

"It's never amiss having a business at one's finger ends —Imogen might have to earn her own living one day," he argued roughly. "Especially if we go on throwing money away as we are doing at present."

"Luke!" exclaimed his mother at this, "don't talk like that! You'll drive me mad." Tears positively stood in her cold eyes, and her voice shook. Luke was impressed by this unusual emotion, and when he next spoke his tone was more considerate.

"Of course, you'd be alone all day," he said. "I quite realise that."

Mrs. Armitage gave an impatient exclamation.

"What has that got to do with it?" she demanded scornfully. "Imogen's welfare is always my first consideration. But when I think of what I hoped for her!" Her voice broke into a wail as she concluded: "I simply can't bear it!"

"We can hope nothing for her unless she's roused," said Luke gravely.

Mrs. Armitage, irritated by his professional air, exclaimed again impatiently, but made no other reply. Two days later she withdrew her objection to the Bradford scheme, and characteristically produced almost at once the name—elicited by her deprecating drawl from the wide circle of her acquaintance—of an excellent little man in Bradford who took a few people of good education, gave them individual attention, and guaranteed them posts at the end of the course.

"Though I hardly imagine that even you will want Imogen to go as far as that, Luke," she concluded acidly.

Luke, delighted by his mother's surrender of the main point, abstained from retort. The preliminaries were rapidly arranged by Mrs. Armitage, who had a particular skill in correspondence of this kind, and one bright morning in late September Imogen found herself walking to the station by Luke's side, *en route* for the office of the estimable Mr. Jagger.

The early rising and departure with Luke had rather stimulated her, but she was sorry for her mother, whose face, as she stood at the door to watch the two down the path, had looked worn and tragic. The train which bore Luke to Leeds had a rear portion which branched off to Bradford, so that Imogen could entrain under her brother's protection; and it was certainly pleasant to be walking briskly beside him through this clear morning sunshine. As they approached the station, however, and especially while Imogen waited docilely by the barrier for Luke to buy her ticket, the girl became so extremely pale that Luke feared his remedy was ill-advised and that his sister was not yet strong enough to stand the early morning rush. It was no use giving way now, however, before the experiment had had a fair chance; so he hardened his heart, and the two descended to the platform, which was full of men and women on their way to business and children

on their way to school, all waiting, with a degree of patience proportionate to their age and sex, for the Leeds and Bradford train. A small engine flew busily up and down between the tunnel points and the platform, performing some complicated shunting evolution. Imogen saw all these things through a mist of pain, and she could scarcely make her pale lips move to answer Luke's cheerful comments on the lively scene. The train came in with a great roar, and there was a tumult of people hurling themselves in different directions. Luke put Imogen into a half-full compartment, and seemed loth to leave her. His face was anxious, and Imogen managed to produce a wan smile to comfort him.

"Of course, if you don't like it," urged Luke through the open window, "you needn't go any more."

Imogen smiled again, and Luke vanished. The train gathered itself together, left the station, and plunged reluctantly into the sulphurous tunnel. Imogen leaned back and closed her eyes.

She opened them again as the train slowed down, and found the carriage ambling gently to a standstill beside the white wooden palings of that rural station, High Roebuck. At the sight of the name of this place, where one of the actors of Johnnie's never-to-be-forgotten drama lived, anguish clutched at the girl's heart; she neither moved nor cried out, but the waters of bitterness seemed to close over her, for Brearley Thornton still lived, while Johnnie was dead. She remembered with a kind of despair that almost every train from Hudley to Bradford, and vice versa, stopped at High Roebuck—not because the village of High Roebuck was important as regards railway traffic, for it was not. Imogen had never been to High Roebuck, but she knew from common report that the village consisted of a single long steep street climbing the brow of a hill, a church, two chapels, the Thornton mills, and Brearley Thornton's house. The village

was more or less connected with Hudley, to the county borough of which it was nowadays attached, by trams; but it was scarcely connected at all with the High Roebuck station, which was so far away from the village—and in the valley to boot—that its name was quite grotesquely inappropriate. Round the High Roebuck station, however, had grown up a flourishing little colony of mills and shops and houses; and many men lived there whose daily business took them either up or down the line. It was for their convenience that the trains paused at the little station; but the inhabitants of High Roebuck proper evidently took advantage of the good railway facilities at times, for Brearley Thornton was undoubtedly standing on the station platform at that moment, looking fresh and jaunty, with a folded newspaper under one arm. Imogen shrank back in her seat and hoped that he would not see her. Not, of course, she reflected, that he would recognise her even if he did see her—that brief encounter in the cinema seemed years ago, and Imogen felt that she had aged out of recognition since then—but the mere risk of it was insupportable. Johnnie's survivor found a seat, and the train moved on. An immense weariness and discouragement filled Imogen's heart, and as her head drooped on her breast she asked nothing more of the world than to be out of it with Johnnie.

It was in this mood that, half an hour later, she climbed Mr. Jagger's modest stair and knocked at his door. She had had some difficulty in finding the place, and was evidently rather late, for an assemblage of young female pupils was already collected round the oblong table. Feeling embarrassed and ill at ease, Imogen removed her outdoor clothes and hung them on an appropriate peg by the door, then took the empty chair which Mr. Jagger assigned to her. Her new preceptor was a short, lively, sandy-haired, humorous, conscientious little Yorkshireman whose manner seemed posi-

tively to bristle with kindness—that was the only way Imogen could find of indicating to Luke later Mr. Jagger's peculiar brand of perky good-humour. After providing her with text-books and writing materials he sat down beside her, and under his instructions she soon found herself drawing light and heavy strokes with great care and exactness. The cheerful kindness of the little man, and the absurd ease of her initiation into the commercial mysteries, lightened her heavy heart and made her feel less nervous, though as yet she kept her eyes on the page and did not dare to inspect her fellow-learners. Mr. Jagger now moved his chair—Imogen perceived that it was constantly peripatetic—away from her to the side of another pupil, whose home-work he evidently found extremely unsatisfactory. His attempts to convey how deeply it shocked him, without being unkind or severe, were really very comical, and Imogen looked up once or twice with a slight smile. Most of the others seemed to take his pleasantries stolidly and as a matter of course, but Imogen met a slow answering smile on the face of the pupil opposite. She lowered her eyes quickly, not, however, before she had observed that this pupil was very different from all the others: she was older, and had an extremely interesting face. Imogen stole a glance at one of her text-books, which was laid neatly sideways on the table between them; it was inscribed "Miriam Louisa Hoad" in a remarkably beautiful, clear, and legible hand.

With a final outburst of shocked exclamations Mr. Jagger now rose, and, observing aloud that if he didn't know the next book was going to be a good one he really shouldn't have the courage to go on with his morning's work, moved his chair again, this time to the side of Imogen's *vis-à-vis*.

"Now, Miss Hoad," he said genially, drawing her note-book to him and bending over it his earnest little face. Miss

Hoad directed his attention to the right place in a thin, subdued voice, and coughed slightly.

Imogen, who had almost completed her page of "p's" and "b's," looked at her again. Miss Hoad was a woman in the middle thirties, or perhaps rather older; she had a thin, almost emaciated body, scanty dark hair, and a dark, lean, intense face out of which looked extraordinarily fine and glowing brown eyes which compelled Imogen's attention. Her high shoulders and long arms gave her a bony and angular appearance, and her neck was almost painfully thin; her clothes, though not in the current fashion, were extremely neat, and suited her. As she sat there, explaining her work to Mr. Jagger in her strained thin voice, and turning over pages slowly with her long thin hand, there was a look of strength and fire and dignity about her which made her not at all of Mr. Jagger's pupils but of all time. She turned her head, and her deep glowing eyes met Imogen's; decidedly her face was memorable. Imogen drew a row of heavy strokes with more zest.

Presently a fresh bevy of pupils streamed in, and it appeared that Imogen and her companions were to go to another room to deal with the science of typing. Imogen followed the rest, but not knowing what she was supposed to do when she reached the typing-room, hung back and felt wretchedly uncomfortable. As no one came to relieve her embarrassment, she relapsed into the apathy which was habitual with her nowadays, and stood by the door with drooping head and unseeing eyes, her whole pose unconsciously expressing a profound though silent grief. Miss Hoad, having seated herself with a competent air in front of an impressive-looking machine, gave her a searching look from her luminous brown eyes, and smiled at her. Immediately Imogen felt as though a soothing touch had been laid on her sore and bruised heart. There was perception in Miss

Hoad's glance, sympathy in her slow smile; instinctively the girl knew that Miss Hoad, like herself, had known sorrow and been acquainted with grief, and a sudden rush of feeling drew her strongly to the elder woman. The attraction was evidently mutual, for Miss Hoad immediately rose, and advancing on the forlorn girl with a curious mincing, stalking gait, laid a timid hand on Imogen's arm, and by drawing her to the notice of the busy instructress, smoothed her path for her.

When the lunch hour came and the other pupils clattered rapidly down the stairs and vanished, Imogen was again rather at a loss, and, having descended to the street, stood looking about her and trying to remember one out of the many places which Luke had recommended for her meal. While she was unsuccessfully engaged in this occupation, Miss Hoad came out and passed slowly along the street without noticing Imogen. She had a book under her arm, and Imogen observed that it was a well-known translation of *Œdipus Tyrannus*. The notion of anyone thus taking Sophocles out to lunch intrigued her and brought a faint smile to her lips—it was the kind of thing she could imagine Johnnie doing, and Luke would be interested to hear of it. On a sudden impulse she ran after Miss Hoad, and when she had caught up to her asked rather breathlessly if she could recommend her a place for lunch. Miss Hoad hesitated, then looking down her nose informed Imogen haughtily in her thin tones that she herself was lunching in Bradford that day, if Miss Armitage cared to come with her. Imogen replied at once that she would be delighted, whereupon the elder woman's face softened into a beam of gratification and pleasure, and the two went off together to the modest vegetarian restaurant which Miss Hoad patronised.

"It's rather crowded here," mused Miss Hoad, leaning back and looking round at the bustling scene with a satisfied air;

"but that's why I like it. It's full of life and youth, you know. You feel as if you're part of the great stream of humanity."

"Do you?" said Imogen rather doubtfully. She was somewhat abashed by her new friend's plunge into abstractions; moreover, since Johnnie's death she did not feel to be part of anything: she was desolate and alone.

"When you're with a great many people and you think that each of them has their own troubles," explained Miss Hoad in the thin reedy tones which consorted so ill with her fine eyes, "it seems to make it easier to bear your own."

"Perhaps it does; I haven't thought of it in that way," replied Imogen rather dryly, divided between distress at Miss Hoad's *naïveté* in making this remark to a perfect stranger, and admiration for the simple sincerity with which it was made.

"You've thought I'm rather an odd sort of person, haven't you?" said Miss Hoad unexpectedly, her fine eyes beaming with amusement.

Imogen gave her soft little laugh, and coloured.

"I like odd sorts of persons," she replied quietly.

Before Johnnie's death this remark would not have been true, but it was such a relief to Imogen nowadays to meet someone entirely different from the Royd Bank household that she spoke with conviction. A slight flush on Miss Hoad's sallow cheek showed that she was pleased.

That night at dinner Imogen talked—of Mr. Jagger, of Miss Hoad, of the mysteries of shorthand—more than she had done since Johnnie's death; and even Mrs. Armitage did not propose that she should abandon Luke's experiment. Next morning Imogen greeted Miss Hoad with a friendly smile; at noon the elder woman gave her a glance of proud inquiry, and as a result they lunched together. On the following day Imogen turned her dark eyes on Miss Hoad appealingly, and again they lunched together. Soon this arrangement was an

understood thing; and by imperceptible degrees a curious friendship grew up between them, based simply on the attraction each felt for the other's personality, for they exchanged mutual reserves rather than mutual confidences. Imogen, for example, occasionally referred vaguely to Luke and Mrs. Armitage, but did not mention Johnnie nor explain how she came to be attending Mr. Jagger's; and on her side too Miss Hoad was something of a mystery. It was sufficiently obvious to Imogen, from various details of her speech and dress, that her family circumstances were narrow and unpretentious, yet she was unique among Mr. Jagger's pupils in being able to write letters after her name—she possessed a London University degree. She was a woman of great ambition, wide though uncorrelated reading, and, as Imogen judged, intense ability within certain limits; she was proud and austere, and though very sensitive did not lack humour; her thin reedy voice, her slight dry cough, her stooping awkward gait, were all curiously at variance with the real strength and fire and dignity of her character. It was not quite clear to Imogen how she came to be at Mr. Jagger's at all; it would have been more natural to find that she had earned her living for the past twelve or fifteen years, and indeed from various references it seemed as though she had really done this, though she never spoke of the business or profession in which she had been engaged. She was far and away Mr. Jagger's best pupil; her work was scrupulously exact and miraculously neat, but rather slow, because she could not bear to leave the smallest detail imperfect. Imogen's methods, which though less exact were more rapid, rather irritated her; she would sometimes lengthily explain to the girl, as they made their way slowly along the crowded streets or dodged the traffic across Town Hall Square, the ideal of perfection which animated her work—breaking off, however, to observe, with her quiet affectionate smile, that such ideals were not

for heads as young and pretty as Miss Armitage's. It was thus she designated her companion; Imogen was reserved and Miss Hoad was proud, and a more intimate form of address had not been broached between them.

Luke took a great interest in Miss Hoad, at first assumed, to make Imogen talk, later perfectly genuine. He inquired regularly every evening: "Well, what has Miriam Louisa fresh to-day?" Imogen could usually satisfy him with some anecdote or other, for a curious strain of *naïveté* was mingled with Miss Hoad's learning. She informed Imogen once that she had read Plato's *Republic*—the name of that work having occurred in some philosophical remark she was making—in bed at nights by the aid of a flashlight; but when the girl exclaimed admiringly at her knowing Greek so well, Miss Hoad looked at her with a kind of scornful astonishment and replied, with her feeble but precise enunciation and her dignified little cough, that the Greek tongue was unknown to her.

"Of course you meant a translation; how stupid of me! It must have been difficult enough in English," murmured Imogen soothingly.

Miss Hoad, however, remained silent and looked hurt; it was obvious that to her a translation differed from the original by less than a hair's-breadth.

When Imogen repeated these and other similar occurrences to Luke he seemed much struck, and his interest in Miss Hoad deepened; he wanted to know what kind of a family she had and where she got her books. These particulars were not in Imogen's possession, and the lack of them piqued her curiosity about her new companion, for whose scrupulous integrity, firm will, and keen intelligence she, like the rather overawed Mr. Jagger, had a thorough respect.

As the bleak West Riding winter gradually succeeded the pleasant autumn, Miss Hoad's physical well-being seemed to deteriorate; her voice grew fainter, she coughed more fre-

quently, her sallow face appeared strained and haggard, her fine dark eyes took on a painful expression of physical impotence and mortified pride, and her progress about the cold wet roads became daily more slow and difficult. Imogen would have been glad to take her arm and help her, but once when she tried to do this she received a repulse which made a further attempt impossible, for Miss Hoad with a proud glance withdrew her arm and walked on in haughty silence; it seemed to wound her deeply that anything in the nature of physical infirmity should be attributed to her. For a week or two in November, however, she was obliged to give in and be absent intermittently from Mr. Jagger's office. Imogen found the vegetarian restaurant unbearably dull without her; she repaired to a more expensive café, and spent more on her meal than she could really afford. Her slowly reviving spirit drooped again in the elder woman's absence, and she was heartily glad—as was Luke—when at length Miss Hoad returned to work, frail but indomitable.

One raw afternoon in late November, as they were crossing the square towards Imogen's homeward train and Miss Hoad's tram—Imogen modifying her brisk young pace to suit her friend's slow steps, each of which represented a conscious effort—Miss Hoad suddenly slipped and fell, measuring her length on the muddy road. Imogen sprang to her side, and, seizing her arm, tried to help her to rise; to her alarm, for a heavy lorry was bearing rapidly down upon them, she felt no responsive movement in Miss Hoad's limbs. Dropping her attaché-case, she put both arms beneath her friend's shoulders, and exerting all her strength dragged her to safety on the pavement. Miss Hoad regained her balance, staggered out of Imogen's arms, and propped herself against an adjacent pillar-box. The incident was over, and Imogen's case crushed out of recognition, in a second; the lorry drew up a little farther on, and the driver, dismounting, retrieved

the remains of the case and asked Imogen anxiously whether her companion were all right—it had been a near thing, he observed with a sober face.

"Quite, thank you," replied Miss Hoad in a faint tone, averting her head coldly.

The kindly driver explained that he had put his brakes on as hard as he dare, but that it was a greasy day, very; he reiterated his opinion that it had been a near thing, expressed sorrow for the condition of Imogen's case, suggested that they had better call a taxi to take the young woman home in, and, resuming his high seat, drove the lorry—which curiously enough was marked in large letters "John Thornton, High Roebuck"—slowly away. A few children had already collected and were gazing open-mouthed at Miss Hoad, who was plastered with mud from head to foot; even her deathly white face was splashed, and her hands were soiled through her fabric gloves. Imogen took her arm firmly and drew her away.

"Shall we take his advice and call a taxi?" she inquired, trying to make her voice sound calm and even.

Miss Hoad shook her head and said faintly "No," but offered no other suggestion, and stood still as if incapable of further movement. Imogen could feel that her thin body was trembling against her arm, and her eyes were dull and glazed. The girl hesitated, perplexed, and then suggested that her friend should accompany her to the station, which was only a few hundred yards up the slope; there was a cloak-room there, where she could repair her appearance and rest a while, and tea would probably be available. Miss Hoad assented by a slight nod, and the two moved off up the road together. Imogen felt that her own limbs were not as firm, nor her mind as composed, as she could have wished; the shock had been severe, and her nerves were not in a condition to stand shocks, especially ones which involved a possible loss of life.

Arrived at the station, she left the exhausted Miss Hoad to recline for a few minutes on the horsehair cloak-room couch while she went to the telephone-box and briefly explained the circumstances to Jennifer, saying that the time of her return was uncertain and that they were not to be alarmed if she was late. When she returned Miss Hoad was sitting up, and her face had resumed a more normal hue; she managed to smile at Imogen, but could not yet speak. Imogen too had no desire to talk; in silence she sponged her companion's dress, adjusted her hat, and tried to bring some warmth to her cold hands by rubbing them. Miss Hoad declined the alcoholic stimulant suggested by the attendant with something of her wonted decision, and Imogen brought some tea from the refreshment-room next door. By this time Imogen's train had long since gone, the rush hour was over, the station had a deserted air, and the stuffy little cloak-room was empty, even the attendant having retired to mysterious premises in the rear. The two sat side by side on the slippery horsehair couch, with the tea-tray and its thick greyish-white crockery resting in front of them on the cloak-room's solitary chair. The tea seemed to revive Miss Hoad; her eyes began to glow again, and her customary grasp of the situation returned.

"Well, my dear!" she said at last in her thin difficult voice, smiling at Imogen and sending her a loving glance from her brown eyes. "What an adventure, to be sure!"

"What, indeed!" assented Imogen wearily, trying to return the smile. "I'm afraid your people will be anxious at your long absence."

Miss Hoad gave her precise little cough. "Very likely," she assented indifferently. Suddenly she leaned across to Imogen and exclaimed with tremendous fervour, "You saved my life!"

"It will pay for Johnnie's, then!" cried Imogen, who, though she had never mentioned it to any living soul, had

never been able to forget that it was she who had put that fatal acid within Johnnie's reach. She burst into hysterical tears and covered her face with her hands.

"Imogen!" exclaimed Miss Hoad, half rising. "Imogen! My darling! What is it?"

There was such a wealth of love in her thin tones, and such dignity, stamped there by suffering, in her whole person, that Imogen gave way without reserve to her emotion; weeping wildly she poured out her sad little story of Johnnie and her love and his death, of her endless grief for his unhappiness—"what he must have gone through to do it!" she cried again and again in tones which pierced her listener's heart—and of her own broken life. Miss Hoad, straining the girl passionately to her flat breast with her lean arms, rocked her slowly back and forth, murmuring soothing words of comfort and stroking her hair with a loving maternal hand. Her glowing eyes were fixed on her surroundings, but she did not see the dingy distempered walls, the black seats, the dirty cups and saucers, the dusty table clamped to the floor; she was lost in a deep and generous devotion, an intense desire to comfort and console: it was the spiritual maternity for which her starved soul was craving. Imogen, on the other hand, saw every sordid detail of the place; they were part of the terrible grimness, the black misery, which had descended on her world since Johnnie's death. She was surprised to find that Miss Hoad apparently loved her, but she threw herself on this love with an immense relief. When at last, worn out with tears, she raised herself from Miss Hoad's breast and pushed back her hair with a weary hand, she felt that the bond between them was closer now than the bond between herself and Luke, for Miss Hoad knew more about Johnnie's love than Luke did. The two exchanged a long glance, then Imogen smiled drearily at her companion and looked at her watch.

Miss Hoad gave her little cough.

"Is it time for your train yet, dear?" she asked in her thin voice.

"I've missed another," said Imogen, looking at her watch again. "But it doesn't matter—I don't want to go home yet." She threw herself back against the horsehair couch in an attitude of complete exhaustion.

"Why not?" said Miss Hoad.

"I just don't want to," said the heartsick Imogen.

Miss Hoad coughed again.

"Will you come home with me?" she began.

"Of course," agreed Imogen quickly, sitting up—she felt that she ought to have suggested this herself. "After your accident, naturally."

"Because there are some things I should like to tell you," continued Miss Hoad, disregarding the interruption. "Now that I know your secrets I should like you to know mine."

She turned her eyes to Imogen in a grave open look which atoned for any lack of taste in her remark. The girl rose, and repaired as far as was possible the ravages of her tears; then the two left the station together.

"If you don't mind," suggested Miss Hoad, clearing her throat, "we might turn down here through the quiet streets and join the tram-route later on."

Imogen passively agreed.

Miss Hoad, speaking always in thin difficult tones, began slowly to unfold to Imogen, as they went along, the reason for her presence at Mr. Jagger's office, at her age, amid the crowd of young girls who flocked there on leaving school. Until a month or two ago she had been, she said, an elementary school teacher. She had loved her profession and done well in it, and with her intense ambition to succeed had worked for her degree with a correspondence college, teaching by day and learning by night. That was ten years ago.

"I had any amount of energy then, my dear," she ex-

plained in her high strained voice. "Nothing was too much for me." She bent on the girl that beautiful maternal smile which had from the first won Imogen's heart, and added without bitterness: "I expect I wore myself out."

She had wanted to do well because of Ivy. It appeared that Ivy was her niece; her married brother had been killed in the war, and his wife, with her little daughter, Ivy, had come and joined the Hoad household on the death of her husband's mother. Lois (the wife) had her pension, of course; but from Miss Hoad's tone it seemed likely that the pension would not go far towards satisfying Ivy. Ivy was growing up now; she was a pretty child, and quick, and Miss Hoad had great ambitions for her; and everything had gone well until a year or two ago, when Miss Hoad had begun to have trouble with her voice. She had struggled on for some months without taking any steps, hoping that it would come all right again; then she had sought medical advice and rested for a while; then she had resumed her work, then rested again, and so on, until at last it was obvious that if her voice were ever to recover it would not be while she was in the teaching profession. So she had given up her beloved teaching—the fruit of so many years' work and the object of so many hopes—and had boldly decided to waste all these precious months in learning an entirely new art from Mr. Jagger before she threw herself into the wages market again.

"It wasn't easy to break off from all my old life and begin a new one," she said, with the serious emphasis which had such an old-fashioned ring; "and at first the atmosphere seemed so different. But now I like it." Her dark eyes beamed humorously at Imogen as she concluded: "And I've got you." She hesitated, then added with rather less assurance: "I should like you to see Ivy."

Imogen made a suitable reply; in reality she was too much overcome by the revelation of Miss Hoad's courage to take

much interest in the youthful Ivy. Her cheeks positively tingled with shame as she contrasted Miss Hoad's conduct with her own. After thirty odd years her companion could stand amid the ruins of one career and boldly plan another. Imogen's attitude to life had been very different. Of course, the circumstances were far more tragic—her grief for Johnnie was sacred and inviolable, natural and entirely praiseworthy; it was not that for which she blamed herself. But what a fuss she had made about her broken life! What a time she had given poor Luke and Mrs. Armitage! She saw herself as she had sat huddled over the fire a month or two ago, and heard her sullen and apathetic answers; and the colour mounted to her forehead. She was ashamed of herself. Johnnie would not have loved an Imogen who behaved like that. She turned to Miss Hoad and exclaimed impulsively:

"I do admire you!"

Miss Hoad gave her little cough, well-pleased.

"I could never have done it without my philosophy," she announced with lofty enthusiasm.

Imogen sighed, and said "No?" in a rather perfunctory tone. She was as yet too much occupied with living to take any great interest in a philosophy of life, and she considered Miss Hoad's habit of breaking into solemn generalities rather absurd—it was not done in the circles the Armitages frequented. That was the worst of Miss Hoad, she reflected; after doing or saying something particularly fine she let you down with a drop into the unintentionally ridiculous. Imogen's taste often shrank from her philosophic crudities; but as often the girl felt ashamed of her unkind criticism of one whose opportunities for acquiring taste had been so limited. She felt ashamed now of her own lack of interest, and hastily added: "Tell me about it."

Miss Hoad's face had taken on a bleak expression of offended pride.

"I can see you don't really wish to hear about it in the least," she said haughtily, "but I'm going to tell you all the same, because I thing it may help you."

Imogen coloured again and felt abashed, but on second thoughts could not help giving vent to her clear soft laugh—there was something about Miss Hoad's manner of administering snubs which attracted her. "Begin," she said. "I'm listening earnestly."

Miss Hoad hesitated. "It's rather difficult," she said. "But you think you have a grudge against Fate because it has treated you so badly, don't you?"

"Oh no, I don't," protested Imogen untruthfully, taken aback by this unexpected piece of perception.

"Oh yes, you do," insisted Miss Hoad. "You expected that your life would be happy and that everything would go well with you."

"Surely everyone hopes for that?" said Imogen.

"Why should they?" demanded Miss Hoad, becoming excited. "What warrant have they for thinking so? It's an entirely false conception of the Universe."

"Oh, I don't pretend to understand the Universe!" murmured Imogen in smiling alarm.

"But I do!" cried Miss Hoad.

In rapid, uneven, jerky tones she poured out her own conception of the Universe, which proved, Imogen found, to be largely a matter of quotations. Nature or Providence or the Immanent Will or the Eternal Laws or whatever one chose to call it, explained Miss Hoad, was neither benevolent nor malicious, but simply neutral, unconscious and purposeless. Therefore man's happiness or unhappiness was purely a matter of chance; there was nothing to have a grudge against, and all one could do was to take the blows of fortune with head "bloody but unbowed." Happiness, indeed, was almost more than one could expect in the circumstances. In support

of this Miss Hoad cited Sophocles, and also rolled out some fine passages from *The Dynasts*.

> ". . . like a knitter drowsed,
> Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,
> The Will has woven with an absent heed
> Since life first was,"

she intoned excitedly, forcing her thin voice to an unwonted fire, and quickening her slow steps to an unprecedented pace.

In spite of herself, Imogen was interested and impressed, and walked beside her companion thoughtfully. Miss Hoad gave her an eager glance, and reassured by what she saw in her face produced further quotations.

> "It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
> Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
> Whose patterns, wrought by rapt æsthetic rote,
> Seem in themselves Its single listless aim,
> And not their consequence,"

she recited, and Imogen realised that Miss Hoad's voice had once been one of her most cherished possessions.

"I see," she said. "You think that my having urged Johnnie to go to Leeds was one of these eternal artistries of circumstance, woven with an absent heed?"

Miss Hoad, delighted to be taken so seriously, nodded with emphasis.

"I don't see that it helps you much," observed Imogen, who was in reality deeply moved, though whether by Miss Hoad's creed, or by the pathos of her holding it, she did not know.

"Don't you?" said Miss Hoad, disappointed. "It helped me, and I hoped it would help you. It takes away the feeling of resentment against an adverse fate, you know; it takes the sting out of suffering to feel that nobody wished you to suffer, that it has come by chance."

Her intense earnestness and the magnitude of her subject

were so at variance with the coloured lights and salacious posters of a music-hall they were just passing that Imogen could not forbear a cynical smile, which, however, she immediately suppressed.

"It's not a very hopeful creed, is it?" she said gently. "If you believe that, there doesn't seem to be much point in anything."

"Oh, but that's only the first part of it!" exclaimed Miss Hoad triumphantly. "That's how things are. Now for what they may become." She threw back her head, and quoted again:

> "Nay;—shall not Its blindness break?
> Yea, must not Its heart awake,
> Promptly tending
> To Its mending
> In a genial germing purpose, and for loving-kindness' sake?"

"Who will wake it?" enquired Imogen sceptically in tones very like her mother's when she argued with Luke.

"Man!" cried Miss Hoad with enthusiasm, and quoted Hardy extensively.

"But how can Man wake it?" pursued Imogen, interested but appalled by the, to her, fantastic futility of this creed which was the mainstay of Miss Hoad's wonderful courage.

Miss Hoad explained rather confusedly that every good action contributed to that grand consummation. "Anthropomorphism," she announced in a firm pedagogic tone, "contains a profound truth. Man creates God in his own image; God can only have the attributes which man creates for him —as Wells says, you know," she explained eagerly, "in *The Undying Fire,* where God tells the enquiring man that if mankind wants Him to have a card index of the people in the world, mankind must make one. Oh! there are heaps of quotations. The point is that a just and loving God is in the

future, not in the past; we are evolving Him. Perhaps we are evolving into Him—man, you know, is not final, according to Schopenhauer. In any case, it all comes down to this—if mankind wants a just and loving God it must be just and loving itself. That's my philosophy!" she concluded triumphantly. "It has seen me through some dark hours."

A fit of coughing interrupted her, and she was obliged to stand still till it was over, while her high shoulders shook and her thin face flushed painfully.

"There's a beautiful quotation from Bojer which says exactly what I mean," she continued at length in an exhausted voice. "From his novel, *The Great Hunger,* you know. It's this: 'Therefore I went out and ploughed my enemy's field, that God might exist.'"

Imogen, touched, agreed gravely that it certainly was beautiful; but she begged her companion not to talk any more; she had had a severe shock that evening, and was not equal to any further exertion.

"Is it far to your home now?" she enquired, looking about her and noticing with alarm her companion's laboured breathing.

"We can take a tram just round this corner," said Miss Hoad huskily.

She dragged herself painfully the few necessary yards to the point where the tram stopped, then propped herself against a tram standard and remained silent until the appropriate vehicle arrived, when she murmured faintly: "This is the one," and insisted on Imogen mounting it before herself.

After a few minutes' ride uphill, during which they were both silent, Imogen musing over what she had heard, Miss Hoad leaning back with closed eyes, recuperating her exhausted forces, they dismounted, and turned off the main road into a short side street, lined on each side by a row of

small houses whose yellow-stoned steps shone in the lamplight. A small grocer's shop stood at one end, and the other was closed by a high wall, probably the rear of some mill or warehouse. Miss Hoad stopped before a door under the shadow of this wall, knocked, then turned the handle and went in, motioning Imogen to follow. The girl did so, and found herself in the Hoads' living-room.

She saw at once that their circumstances were even narrower and less pretentious than she had supposed; and gauging the mental calibre of the three persons round the fire who now turned curious eyes upon her, she measured more generously the immense effort which Miss Hoad must have made to reach her present intellectual standard. The widowed Mr. Hoad was a thin elderly man with scanty whitish hair and a drooping moustache; his blue eyes, though kindly, had a faded and hopeless air, and his whole person expressed a resigned mildness which was at the opposite pole from his daughter's almost fierce enthusiasm. He turned his head as the girls came in, expressed satisfaction at Miriam's return, and stared in surprise as Imogen appeared. Miss Hoad, who seemed stiff and nervous and less at ease here than at Mr. Jagger's or when explaining her philosophy in the street, explained the circumstances of her delay, pitching her tired voice uncomfortably high so that her father, who was evidently rather deaf, could hear her. There were many exclamations of sympathy and alarm from Mr. Hoad and his daughter-in-law; a chair was pressed upon Imogen, and she was urged to give her account of the affair and to display her battered attaché-case. Lois Hoad, a stoutish woman with a flat, highly-coloured, kindly face and wisps of untidy brown hair, whom Imogen liked at once, filled the kettle and put it on the fire, and in a nervously genteel voice bade Ivy get the tea-things out for Aunt Mirry and Miss Armitage, as she was sure they must want something after such a to-do as they

had had. Thus adjured, the silent Ivy threw down the silk and lace she was sewing, and rose.

Ivy was much older than Imogen had supposed from Miss Hoad's references to her; she had imagined a child of twelve or so, but Ivy was sixteen at least. She was, as her aunt had said, a pretty little thing; a round babyish face, a complexion of milk and roses, grey eyes veiled by dark lashes, and short ash-coloured hair, made an ensemble of appealing softness and charm. She was prettily dressed in a soft graceful frock of much the same colour as her hair; the cut of the frock showed her youthful limbs a good deal, and as she moved about the room and lifted down china from a cupboard beside the hearth, her slender figure, her smooth hair, which swung away from her neck when she looked upwards, her round white arms and kittenish movements, all drew the eye and brought a smile of pleasure to Imogen's face. The visitor's second impression of Miss Hoad's niece was not so satisfactory. Ivy spoke once or twice to her mother in quick, low, rather impatient tones—her accent was much better than Lois's—and frowned at the answers; Imogen decided that her softness was probably only superficial, for the child had a stubborn little chin, and there was a mutinous look on her small face as she put the plates and cups down on the table with rather more emphasis than was necessary. This view was confirmed as Miss Hoad and herself ate the meal which, in spite of Imogen's protestations, Lois insisted on preparing; Ivy sat apart, sewing, with a look of irritation and ennui on her pert little face; she occasionally jerked out some curt enquiry about the accident, but obviously took not the slightest real interest in her aunt's mishap. Indeed, her manner to Miss Hoad was altogether offhand, not to say rude. Imogen was sure that the material for Ivy's frock had been bought out of Miss Hoad's earning—the child was no doubt clever with her fingers and had made it up herself—and she re-

sented on her friend's behalf Ivy's ingratitude, which she surmised was habitual, and extended to large things as well as small.

Perhaps she was also obscurely irritated by Ivy's contemptuous dismissal, after one rapid all-embracing glance, of her own claim to interest. Imogen was only three years or so older than Ivy, and in spite of herself she resented the child's putting her on the same level of age and dowdiness which she evidently allotted to her mother and aunt. "These old people!" Ivy seemed to say, swinging one silk-clad leg in exasperated boredom. "Really!" For the first time since Johnnie's death Imogen became conscious of her personal appearance, and it positively annoyed her to reflect that at the moment she was not as neat and nice to look at as the critical Ivy. Something must really be done about it, for Johnnie would have hated to see her looking anything but her best. She sighed, and felt that Miss Hoad's family rather depressed her. Mr. Hoad looked weak and ailing, and with his deafness was obviously much handicapped as a wage-earner; Lois was a feckless if good-humoured creature; while Ivy, pretty, sophisticated little minx that she was, did not seem at all likely to carry out her aunt's earnest educational plans for her future career. Imogen thought with pleasure of the Royd Bank household. There was almost a tinge of homesickness in her yearning for them; it seemed so very long since she had parted from them that morning, and she would be so very glad to be safely under their wing again. Yes, she was intensely thankful that her family was not like Miss Hoad's. And yet Miss Hoad, supported only by the very imperfect sympathy of such relatives as hers, had had the courage to construct a philosophy for herself and to make her broken life anew. Imogen's admiration for her friend was redoubled by her glimpse of the Hoad family, and as she bade Miss Hoad farewell at the door—which she did fairly soon,

in order to catch a Hudley train—on a sudden impulse she bent forward and pressed her lips to the elder woman's sallow cheek. Miss Hoad flushed, and did not return the caress, but her expressive eyes told Imogen that she was ready to bestow on her as deep and passionate a devotion as that she gave to Ivy. That modern young woman looked up abruptly at Imogen's piece of sentimentalism, but bent her head over her sewing again without comment or farewell.

That night, as Imogen sat over her belated meal in the Royd Bank dining-room, she gave to the listening Luke and Mrs. Armitage an excited account of the lorry accident and the Hoad *ménage,* and then described as much as she could remember of Miss Hoad's philosophy. Luke was extremely interested; he first said "Ah yes, Hardy," and then observed, "Why, that's a kind of Lamarckism," and told Imogen to direct Miss Hoad's attention to the preface of *Back to Methuselah,* where, he said, she could cull innumerable appropriate quotations, as she seemed so fond of them. Imogen demanded a definition of Lamarckism, Luke gave one, and they began to argue as to whether Miss Hoad thought her philosophy was original or knew that it was derived. In the middle of this Mrs. Armitage impatiently bade Imogen be off to bed, or she would never get up in the morning in time to catch her train. The girl, flushed and animated by the discussion, rather reluctantly obeyed. When the door had closed behind her Mrs. Armitage turned to Luke and observed in a particularly acid drawl:

"I hope you approve, Luke, of all these new friends Imogen is making?"

Her son looked up from his books, which he had arranged on the far end of the dining-table. "If you mean Miriam Louisa," he observed with emphasis, "I consider her the salt of the earth."

Mrs. Armitage gave an angry exclamation. "Of course,"

she said with cutting sarcasm, "I don't pretend to have *your* medical experience, Luke, but it seems obvious to me that the woman has tuberculosis."

Luke groaned. "I've thought that from the first," he admitted slowly. "But I decided that it was no use distressing Imogen by saying so. There's no doubt that Miss Hoad is doing Imogen good."

Mrs. Armitage sighed angrily. "I didn't educate Imogen to associate with such people as Miss Hoad," she observed with bitterness after a pause.

"Don't let's discuss it from that point of view, Mother," said Luke coldly. "We don't agree, and never shall. For Imogen's sake I think we ought to let her intimacy with Miss Hoad go on."

"You take it very calmly!" cried Mrs. Armitage, turning her ravaged face to him. "For my part, all this is killing me. Such a brilliant future as Imogen might have had! And that it should all be ruined by that absurd boy! Of course, perhaps it's not too late yet," she pursued in a quieter tone; "she's still very young."

Luke said nothing; when his mother talked about brilliant futures for Imogen he was always uneasy.

The shock of her narrow escape from the lorry had evidently proved rather a serious one for Miss Hoad, for next morning Imogen did not find her at Mr. Jagger's, and she was absent for several weeks following. Imogen wrote her a little note and asked Mr. Jagger for her address, but to her surprise he did not seem to know it; he explained cheerfully that Miss Hoad had paid in advance, and that was enough for him. Imogen was rather doubtful whether she could find her way to Miriam's home alone without the help of an address, and the attempt proved that her doubts were justified; she tried several times to seek out the elder woman at home, but to Mrs. Armitage's satisfaction was unsuccessful. Though Imo-

gen was deprived of her friend's bodily presence, however, she mused a good deal on her system of philosophy. Did her theory that the great Spinner of the Years wove unconsciously, with an absent heed, really take the sting out of her suffering about Johnnie's death? Imogen thought that perhaps it might, if it were not for old Ullathorne.

II

Luke would perhaps have been less satisfied, and Mrs. Armitage considerably more, with the new friends Imogen was making in Bradford, if they had known the progress of her acquaintance with Brearley Thornton. As the weeks passed on Imogen realised that Thornton took her train every Thursday morning and some Monday mornings—Thursday and Monday being the days for the Bradford Exchange. At first she dreaded these mornings, and shrank back with averted eyes when she caught sight of Johnnie's survivor on the High Roebuck platform; but as her drooping spirit revived under Miss Hoad's silent consolations, she began to think this shrinking foolish on her part—after all, Thornton had been kind to Johnnie. One Thursday morning, when she happened to be occupying a corner seat, Thornton suddenly caught sight of her as he passed up the train. His eyes widened with delight, he coloured, and snatched his hat off with joyous emphasis. A large smile beamed cheerfully from his simple face in response to Imogen's restrained acknowledgment of this courtesy, and for a moment he actually paused in front of her compartment as though wondering whether he dare venture in and join her. He was apparently daunted, however, by the rows of females with attaché-cases who at once fixed upon him an interested glare; for, after a moment of suspense, to Imogen's relief he bounded away to the first-class carriage next door. On reaching Bradford Imogen, who was rather startled by the amount of interest Johnnie's benefactor apparently felt in her, lingered in the train for a second or two in order

to avoid him. This manœuvre was not successful, however, for she found him walking at her side in the crowd which surged towards the barriers.

"You're off early this morning, Miss Armitage," he cried loudly with a jovial laugh. "Going to have a long day's shopping, eh?"

Imogen smiled, and said with exaggerated earnestness: "Dear me, no! Something much more serious." Taking compassion on his ingenuous alarm at this, she briefly explained her occupation. He seemed much struck, ejaculated "Fancy!" rather frequently, and asked her a string of questions, the childlike bluntness of which amused Imogen, about her daily visits to Mr. Jagger's, before she managed to lose him at the barrier.

On the following Thursday he again appeared suddenly at her side, smiling all over his face, and asked how her brother was getting on nowadays, and whether she stayed the whole day in Bradford; and in the course of another week or two he elicited the position of Mr. Jagger's little school and the hour of the midday interval.

It was not, therefore, perhaps altogether accidentally that he came upon Imogen one wet December day, during Miss Hoad's absence, as she was leaving Mr. Jagger's office in the lunch hour. Thornton's fresh open face beamed with pleasure as, almost before he had finished his greeting, he poured out an earnest invitation to her to come and lunch with him. Imogen, confused, and conscious of boredom without Miss Hoad, consented without quite having meant to do so. Thornton immediately whisked her off to an excellent hotel and provided her with a large meal and some good wine. As it was market day the great high room was full, and men were constantly exchanging signals of intimacy with Thornton, which he returned with gusto; he seemed to be in excellent spirits; his face was flushed and he chattered incessantly to

the rather shy and quiet Imogen, exciting himself about her food, deferring to her opinion, and flattering her in a way so naïve that Imogen felt quite motherly to him. They had coffee and cigarettes—to Brearley's disappointment Imogen declined her liqueur, so he was obliged to drink his alone—in the empty lounge upstairs. Brearley, leaning confidentially over the small round table which separated them, told Imogen in a low voice the full details of various deals in yarn which he had completed on the Exchange that morning, in which, according to him, he had shown remarkable skill and cunning. Imogen, of course, did not understand a word of it; she understood only that he was a simple, amiable soul, who had been kind to Johnnie, knew all about Johnnie and herself—had he not attended, according to Luke, the Talland inquest?—and wanted to be kind to her. She tried to smile in the right places, and was relieved to find that his own broad smile always answered hers. His eyes wandered rather frequently to her unconsumed liqueur, and on a very slight encouragement from her he drank it. When he had done so, however, he seemed abashed by his own act, coloured and fell abruptly silent. Imogen felt sorry for him and tried hard to think of something soothing to say.

From his mention of yarn and her mother's reiterated statements about the wealth of spinners she surmised that Brearley was a spinner, and said so, observing that she understood spinners had to do with yarn. Brearley revived at once, and hailed Imogen's poor little remark as evidence of the highest intelligence; indeed, it was obvious that he had a respect amounting to awe for Imogen's intelligence. He leaned forward over the table again, and gave her a long, highly technical, extremely incoherent and only moderately correct account of the whole of the textile industry as practised in the West Riding. Imogen understood little of this, but she was really interested, and bore patiently with his repetitions and muddled

explanations; at the back of her mind all the time she was busy reconstructing the scene between Johnnie and Thornton, the scene from which Johnnie had emerged minus his motor-cycle but with money in his pocket and hope in his heart.

At length she began to feel that she had been in the lounge an unconscionable time; waiters came, removed the coffee-cups and hung about as though hoping for further orders. Imogen looked at her watch and said that she must go. Brearley's face fell, and he rose reluctantly. When they reached the door of the hotel it was still raining. Brearley eagerly urged a taxi, which Imogen smilingly refused—his excited good-nature and sincere anxiety lest she should get wet touched her, but did not make the idea of taking a taxi for a five-minutes' walk any less ridiculous.

As she made her way back through the rain to Mr. Jagger's, Imogen reflected on her lunch-hour experience with mild amusement. She quite correctly surmised that Brearley was the kind of man who often took girls out to lunch—a jovial, good-natured, simple soul, with plenty of money, who enjoyed the rather dissipated feeling which the perfectly innocent proceeding gave him. She did not anticipate any repetition of the incident, and forgot the whole affair as she entered Mr. Jagger's office, receiving that little man's humorous rebuke for being late with her usual quiet and absent smile.

In the New Year Miss Hoad returned, looking thin and ill. Her beautiful eyes and loving smile, her quiet humour and refreshing point of view, were all very welcome again to Imogen, especially just now in this fatal month of January, with its terrible associations of Johnnie's death the previous year. She was glad, too, to have Miss Hoad as an excuse when one Thursday morning, as Brearley Thornton was walking beside her down the platform, he abruptly turned pink and began to stammer some confused remarks which presently crystallised into an invitation to lunch. Imogen, surprised

and displeased, explained rather coldly that she always lunched with Miss Hoad.

"Who's she?" demanded Brearley, with a sniff.

Imogen explained that Miss Hoad was a fellow-student and a great friend of hers, and that they always spent the middle of the day together.

"She wasn't with you that day," observed Brearley with a disconsolate air. "When you came with me, I mean."

"She was away ill," explained Imogen again, annoyed by his insistence.

Brearley raised his hat and left her abruptly, a very discontented, not to say sulky, look on his fresh face; and for some weeks afterwards his demeanour to Imogen was cold and offended, and he did not walk beside her in the crowd. Imogen was not displeased by his desertion; she was too heart-sick over her tragic anniversaries to wish for any society but that of her courageous and loving friend. Throughout this month Miss Hoad's attendance at Mr. Jagger's office was extremely regular, so regular that at times Imogen marvelled at the elder woman's power of endurance, for her cough was extremely bad, and progress about the streets was so difficult for her that the two abandoned the vegetarian restaurant and began to patronise a more expensive one near at hand. Imogen spoke freely to Miss Hoad of Johnnie, more freely than she had ever done to anyone, and it was an intense relief to her heavy heart and overwrought nerves. In return for her friend's loving sympathy Imogen told her Luke's ideas on the subject of her philosophy. Miss Hoad's dark eyes lit up at being thus taken seriously by a man of Luke's intellectual standing—she had a great opinion of Luke, founded, of course, entirely on hearsay—and she made an exquisitely neat note of all the quotations he had recommended.

At the beginning of February she was absent again. This time Imogen had her address, and wrote a cordial little note

to her, receiving in return several sheets in Miss Hoad's beautiful legible hand, which told of what Ivy was sewing, and how Miss Hoad was reading up Lamarckism and attempting to keep up her shorthand, but uttered no word of grumbling about her tedious ill-health. She hoped that Imogen was keeping well and blithe "now that January is over." This phrase caught Imogen's attention, and after some pondering she reached correctly its meaning and the fact that lay behind it—namely that Miss Hoad, knowing quite well what January meant to Imogen, had dragged herself to Mr. Jagger's office daily during that month for the girl's sake. In a burst of pity and admiration Imogen rushed to the Hoads' house in her lunch hour that day, to find Lois in alone, who told her that Miss Hoad had gone to an aunt in Southport for a week. She had been very ill all January, Lois said, and ought to have stayed at home, but would not; however, Southport always did her good.

The moment Imogen reached Royd Bank that evening she sat down and wrote to her friend. Since the lorry incident Miss Hoad had, to Imogen's pleasure, addressed the girl by her first name; but Imogen had somehow shrunk from taking a similar liberty with the elder woman. Now, however, she addressed her as "My dear Miriam," and wrote her a long, amusing, affectionate letter, in the course of which she accused Miss Hoad of behaving with sublime foolishness in the past month. Miss Hoad's neat reply did not deny the charge, which was indeed sufficiently established by Lois's observation. Imogen's heart was warmed by her friend's quiet heroism, for it was really nothing less, and she felt more than ever that such devotion must not be wasted; she must crown it with success, subdue her grief and take up life with a courage equal to Miriam's.

The next day was Thursday. As Imogen was walking soberly along to her midday meal Brearley Thornton sud-

denly bounded up to her from a side street, and bellowed joyously in her ear: "Is she away again? Eh?"

He looked about with an air of childlike shrewdness, as if defying Imogen to say that she was not alone, and repeating "She's away?" with intense satisfaction, laughed heartily. His laugh was so candid, and he evidently thought the joke of his having caught her alone like this such a good one, that Imogen remembered his open-handedness to Johnnie and her own determination to be cheerful; she smiled and nodded, a little sparkle of merriment in her eyes, whereupon Brearley's round face beamed with triumph. "What about the 'Midland,' then?" he cried in a loud, eager tone, bending forward to hear her reply. "Eh? Why not?"

Imogen hesitated, but his good-humoured face immediately became so overcast that she relented, and said in her quiet voice, "Very well."

The following Thursday Miriam was still away, and Imogen lunched again with Brearley Thornton; and the Thursday following brought the same event. (Somehow these luncheons were never mentioned at Royd Bank; Imogen felt that Luke would not understand, while Mrs. Armitage would understand altogether too much.) On the Thursday after that, as she and Brearley were sitting together over their coffee, Imogen informed him that Miss Hoad was coming back to work next Monday—she had had a card from her to that effect that morning. She meant to imply by her tone that she would not be able to lunch with him again, and Brearley evidently understood her hint, for he cried: "Do you mean to say you aren't coming with me any more?" in such an extremely aggrieved and incredulous tone that Imogen felt quite nervous. She murmured a soft "Yes," and looked away.

"Well!" exclaimed Thornton loudly. His tone spoke volumes of disappointment, and the soft-hearted Imogen involuntarily looked at him with sympathy. Instantly he leaned

over the table towards her, and, fixing his moist blue eyes in laughing appeal on hers, began to implore her not to let him down like that; her other friend could have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday—he ticked them off repeatedly on his fingers—surely she could give him one day a week! Imogen, amused but alarmed by his vehemence, murmured softly that she would see. He then descended to bargaining, and with many persuasive exclamations and hearty laughs urged her to grant him alternate Thursdays if she couldn't manage a day every week. "That's not much, you know!" he cried. "Now, is it? Eh?"

Imogen smiled, and said again that she would see.

"A fortnight to-day, then," said Thornton cheerfully. When Imogen protested against this assumption he smiled knowingly, shook his head at her and told her that a promise was a promise, and he should keep her to it. Imogen cried out at this, but could not help smiling, and they parted with a good deal of cheerfulness on both sides.

Imogen had begun to harbour the same suspicion concerning Miss Hoad's state of health as Mrs. Armitage and Luke, and she was delighted and surprised on the following Monday to find Miriam's appearance greatly improved by her holiday. She had gained in weight, she told Imogen; her face was less pinched and of a healthier hue; her eyes were brighter, her smile more lively; her voice too was stronger, and at times she was able to indulge in the dry little chuckle which was her nearest approach to a laugh. She held herself more erect, and her walk seemed less strained and painful. The weather favoured her, for the dark winter days were over now; soft winds blew gently down the streets, and the sun shone brightly; the flashing electric advertisements in Market Street had become mere faded coloured bulbs instead of rubies and emeralds jewelling the dark night. Miss Hoad's physical and Imogen's mental health advanced with each day of the ad-

vancing spring. Miriam loved the sunshine; when a golden shaft rested on her she would raise her face to it and give a slow smile of exquisite pleasure which somehow seemed to communicate her own happiness to her companion. Spring flowers bloomed in the open shop windows; Miriam always paused before them to drink in their fragrant beauty, turning away with that same radiant smile of intense enjoyment. Imogen, who had paid a good deal more attention to her appearance since her encounter with Ivy Hoad, took Miriam with her on her search for new spring clothes. These excursions amused and pleased Miss Hoad immensely; she enjoyed the discovery of this new world of fashion—the thick carpets, the rose-shaded lights, the magnificent assistants, the lovely rich-coloured stuffs arranged in graceful folds. She loved to sit perched on some uncomfortable cane chair, her glowing eyes beaming with fun, watching Imogen twist and turn before the large mirror, and saying never a word. Imogen, however, could always tell by her expression whether she liked the article in question or not; and occasionally Miss Hoad would give an emphatic nod to signify intense approval. She was fond of conveying to Imogen, in subtle hints or open statements, that she thought her person beautiful and her taste exquisite; and these hints helped to bring about—as Miriam meant they should—what they suggested. Miss Hoad was fond, too, of dwelling on Imogen's youthfulness; she made innumerable sly references to the gap of years between them, and put on a playful air of authority on the score of her own advanced age. She obviously thought of Imogen as young, beautiful, and frolicsome, and unconsciously Imogen rather enjoyed the character thus thrust upon her.

In their more serious discussions, too, Miss Hoad was never tired of insisting to Imogen that she was young and must rebuild her life. They discussed Miss Hoad's Lamarckist

theory a good deal, and Miriam was constant in pointing its moral and applying it to Imogen's case. It was cowardly, she declared, and likewise in her opinion useless, to sit down under one disaster, however immense, and let it ruin one's whole life. She quoted Henley to the girl, and urged her to pluck up her spirit and have an unconquerable soul, just as it said in the poem. Imogen found her friend's habit of regarding appropriate quotations as panaceas very pathetic—she produced them with so triumphant an air, as if the fact that Henley had said so finished the matter. Miriam's own courage was more impressive to Imogen than any amount of quotations, but she could not help being gradually influenced by Miriam's theory to the extent of thinking it rather a beautiful one, and feeling that though of course it was quite fantastic, it fitted the facts of life as she had seen it remarkably well.

The fact was that Miss Hoad had conceived of Johnnie very much the same opinion as Imogen had of Ivy Hoad. She knew it was perfectly useless to attempt to depreciate Johnnie to Imogen, especially as she only knew him by hearsay; but in her own mind she was quite convinced that he had not been worthy of Imogen—very few people were worthy of Imogen, in Miss Hoad's estimation. He had been selfish, she was sure, flighty, headstrong, and unreliable; for her beautiful Imogen to think of spending all her days in perpetual widowhood for him was simply preposterous, and Miss Hoad did not intend to allow it. She had her own idea, too, about Imogen's alternate Thursday luncheons, which were now quite an old-established habit. Imogen's account of them was vague and reserved, and the name of Brearley Thornton was never mentioned between them; but Miriam felt certain that here was a new admirer for her lovely young friend, and one probably more worthy of her than that despicable Johnnie—he could not very well be less worthy, thought Miss Hoad with puritanic grimness. If this unknown

giver of luncheons really admired and wanted Imogen, as Miss Hoad thought she ought to be wanted and admired, Miriam meant to help him to his wish by every means in her power. She desired marriage for Imogen with all the ardour of a woman who has missed this consummation for herself; and it was for this reason that she dwelt so constantly on Imogen's youth, and told her that it was her duty to be bright and cheerful and happy, that, in fact, she must make her great sorrow a kind of consecration of her life, not the ruin of it.

"It's easy to say that," said Imogen restlessly one day in response to Miss Hoad's urgings. "But what am I to *do?"*

Miriam, clearing her throat and trying to speak warily, explained that Imogen was to do everything that everybody else did; she was not to feel herself cut off from the main stream of humanity by her grief; she was to do everything that the rest of humanity did, and do it specially well—for her grief's sake, if she liked to think so, or for the sake of creating God, as Bojer and Miss Hoad preferred to put it.

With a smile for this last extravagance, which nevertheless rather appealed to her, Imogen said teasingly, "Everything?"

"Everything!" exclaimed Miss Hoad with conviction.

"Do you, for example," enquired Imogen, in a little cynical tone (strongly reminiscent of Mrs. Armitage's) which she sometimes assumed to scare the innocent Miriam, "do you, for example, think I ought to marry?"

"Why not?" demanded Miss Hoad staunchly, delighted that Imogen could even entertain the word.

Imogen winced, and her smile faded. She saw one immense reason why she should not, and yet her question had not been merely an academic one. Her outings with Brearley were less tedious to her than she would have thought possible. For one thing—though Imogen was ashamed of this—the luxury of the hotel was a pleasant change from Mr. Jagger's

office and the vegetarian restaurant; for another, she found herself really interested in Brearley's badly-told textile anecdotes. Miss Hoad was always urging her to build up a new life, and this world of Brearley's, where people spoke Yorkshire and understood how cloth was made, was entirely new to her. There were no mournful associations amongst textiles, and consequently it was easier to be cheerful there than in the professional Royd Bank world. Then, too, Mrs. Armitage and Luke, and even Jennifer, were complex, civilised, self-conscious people, and Miss Hoad, though naïve, was learned; whereas Brearley was a hearty, jolly, straightforward person, who enjoyed eating and drinking—especially the latter, Imogen noticed—laughed when he felt inclined, and was not troubled by doubts about the wisdom of his own actions or by theories of the universe. Altogether there was a homely, rustic flavour about him which Imogen had at first enjoyed, but now she regretted having slipped into intimacy with him. Imogen nowadays was not quite the simple and unsophisticated girl whom Johnnie had kissed in the Royd Bank porch; she was sufficiently self-conscious to suspect that Brearley admired her, and the thought troubled her.

"Do you really think," she repeated rather incredulously to Miss Hoad, "that I ought to marry?"

Miss Hoad turned her glowing eyes on the girl and gave her a beautiful maternal smile.

"My dear, of course!" she said in her thin voice, coughing.

III

Miss Hoad had never seen an opera. She was anxious to know what kind of thing it might be which roused Imogen to such enthusiasm, and it had long been settled between them that when the National Opera Company visited Bradford in the spring Imogen would introduce her to the beauties of Wagner.

When it became time for them to secure tickets, however, Mrs. Armitage objected to Imogen's returning alone from Bradford at a late hour of the night, and seemed much irritated when Imogen mildly waived the point and said she would take Miss Hoad to the Saturday *matinée* instead. As Imogen did not attend Mr. Jagger's on Saturdays, this arrangement would trench on one of the girl's days at home; Mrs. Armitage resented this, and resented still more that Imogen should wish to do it. That Imogen should prefer to go to Wagner in some cheap seat with Miss Hoad instead of taking her proper place in the world at Royd Bank was intensely distressing to Mrs. Armitage; it all seemed part of the blight which had fallen on the Armitage fortunes since the death of that miserable Johnnie. The opera question was decided by Luke, who offered to come to Bradford after his day's work and escort his sister and Miss Hoad to the evening performance of *The Mastersingers*. At this Mrs. Armitage with an exasperated sigh withdrew her opposition, and when Imogen communicated the suggestion to her friend, Miriam's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she agreed with an emphatic nod. She would like extremely, she said, to see Luke, of whom she had heard so much; and she began, with a mixture

of timidity and boldness, to ask a host of questions about him. On his side Luke seemed equally well satisfied with the arrangement—he was curious to see the philosophic Miriam Louisa—so that Imogen felt she was doing an essentially suitable thing in bringing the two together. The trio spent several days in the harmless joys of anticipation, planning out the details of their evening's entertainment, and it was arranged that Luke should meet the two girls outside Mr. Jagger's office, and take them somewhere for a meal before proceeding to the opera.

As the day approached Miss Hoad's excitement grew by leaps and bounds, and when the actual Thursday at length arrived her condition was such that Imogen quite feared for her the reaction of the morrow. She had warned the girl beforehand that she meant to go home in the lunch hour to change—an occurrence of which Brearley Thornton reaped the benefit—and she appeared in the afternoon looking almost handsome in a new dark-silk dress which, it transpired on Imogen's kindly compliment, had come from Ivy's skilful fingers, having probably been prepared specially for this great operatic occasion. Imogen had gradually gathered that Miriam talked a great deal at home about her friendship with the grand Miss Armitage, and she had often felt sorry, for Miriam's sake, that she had looked so unimpressive on the afternoon of the lorry incident; she guessed now that the introduction of Luke into the party had enhanced Miriam's prestige with Ivy, and was glad of it.

Shortly before the end of the afternoon's work, however, there was a slight stir at Mr. Jagger's door, and Mrs. Armitage appeared. She apologised charmingly to the dazzled Mr. Jagger for disturbing his pupils, demanded his candid opinion of Imogen's progress, and asked if she might wait for her daughter in one of the rooms, as she was too tired to stand outside in the street. Mr. Jagger offered her a chair, and Imo-

gen went to her. It appeared that Luke, who was now doing some hospital work, had telephoned an hour ago to say that he would be detained in Leeds that night, and in order not to disappoint the girls Mrs. Armitage had cast everything aside and come in his place. Considering her disapproval of the whole affair it was generous of her, but Imogen could not meet Miriam's eyes as she explained the change of person, for she knew that the elder woman's disappointment would be severe.

Imogen showed her mother the various typewriters and duplicators, in rest and in action; Mrs. Armitage looked at them coldly through her lorgnette and enquired if those were all. Imogen admitted that there was nothing more to show, and felt that her mother was taking a disparaging view of Mr. Jagger's office and all that was in it. By this time work was finished for the day; Miss Hoad came up with her curious mincing step, and Imogen made the two women known to each other. Miss Hoad was obviously still struggling with her disappointment about Luke; her thin body drooped, her tones were cold and her brown eyes without fire as she replied rather haughtily to Mrs. Armitage's drawled amenities. Imogen hurriedly put on her hat and coat and urged the others from the building, reminding them brightly that the opera was long and began early, and they must make a substantial meal or they would fade away before the end of it.

The meal was not a success. Mrs. Armitage's manner to Miss Hoad was extremely kind; she thanked her for her kindness to her daughter, and listened with careful interest to anything she chose to say. But Miriam, once the topic of Imogen was exhausted, said little and appeared ill at ease; Mrs. Armitage's stately presence, her silver hair and fine profile, her pearls and furs and rings, her manner of ordering eatables and of consuming them when they came, were alto-

gether too much for her: she could not cope with them at all, and seemed almost afraid to eat in their company. Occasionally she smiled timidly at Imogen, who responded to the best of her ability, consoling herself with the thought that at any rate Miriam's description of her mother's appearance would impress that little minx Ivy. Meanwhile, the girl suffered from the uncomfortable sensation common when two different parts of one life are suddenly juxtaposed. Beneath her mother's careful courtesy, too, Imogen thought she could see the immense weariness, the bitter disappointment with life, which had lately been growing upon Mrs. Armitage; it saddened her, and made her long to restore her mother's confident and successful air.

The excitement of reaching the theatre and taking their seats, the lights, the vast crowd of people, the great velvet curtain, and the tuning-up of the orchestra, revived all three of them. Miss Hoad's eyes began to glow again, her thin nostrils expanded, and she looked about her with that slow smile which meant, as Imogen knew, that she was enjoying some intense sensation. Mrs. Armitage studied the programme through her lorgnette, and was pleased to discover that her favourite tenor was performing. Imogen sat between them, replied with interest to her mother's instructed comments, and turned eagerly to explain everything to Miss Hoad's unbounded ignorance of matters operatic. She had tried to give Miriam some idea beforehand of the kind of entertainment to be expected, but she was naturally anxious as to the impression she would actually receive. Imogen could see that at first the music puzzled and disappointed her, and she congratulated herself on having selected *The Mastersingers* when she found that Miriam took an intense interest in the plot, setting, and characterisation of the piece. Her remarks on these points were sound, and even Mrs. Armitage listened to them with interest. Hans Sachs Miriam obviously

admired with all the force of her tremendous moral fervour; but she took an unreasonable dislike to Walther—that is, her dislike appeared unreasonable to Imogen, for Miriam herself knew perfectly well why she disliked him: she thought that he was like Johnnie Talland, and that Eva would have done far better to marry the shoemaker. In the second interval, over the coffee Mrs. Armitage had ordered, Miss Hoad, who had quite got over her earlier timidity and was enjoying the aristocratic sensation of drinking coffee at the theatre, leaned towards Imogen and murmured fondly in her ear:

"You might marry someone like Hans Sachs, you know."

Imogen, amused by Miriam's preoccupation with this subject, said "I might!" with a sarcastic inflexion, and returned to her coffee.

"Well, you easily might," persisted Miriam, a beam of fun in her brown eyes. "Why don't you?"

"He would have to ask me first, you know," suggested Imogen lightly, waiving the larger question as unsuitable to the place.

"Pooh!" said Miriam in her thin tones, smiling. "That's quite an exploded notion nowadays—Ivy says so."

"Oh, does she?" said Imogen dryly. "I'm afraid Ivy's a very sophisticated young person, Miriam, and you spoil her."

Miriam's fine eyes clouded, and she looked away. Imogen regretted her hasty aspersions on Ivy, who, after all, had nothing to do with her. Wishing to say something consoling, she added with jocular conviction: "She certainly knows how to make frocks!"

Miss Hoad gave her curious little chuckle at this, and turned back to her companion with an expression of pleasure on her olive face. She seemed about to speak, but just then the conductor reappeared; Imogen had explained the significance of conductors, and Miriam applauded valiantly with the rest.

It was while the heralds of the Mastersingers were marching on to the green at the commencement of the last scene that Mrs. Armitage said suddenly, "We must go."

Miriam looked at her with deep reproach in her brown eyes; Imogen had made her understand that talking during music was an abomination, and with her usual fervour she had promptly become more royalist than the king.

"Oh, not yet, surely!" exclaimed Imogen, trying to look at her watch. She mistook the motive of Miriam's glance, interpreting it as regret at being dragged away from the climax of her first opera, and added, "We *must* hear the prize song."

"We *must* catch our train," said Mrs. Armitage, putting on her gloves.

"Nobody else has gone yet," pleaded Imogen in an undertone, thinking how scornful Ivy would be about her aunt's premature departure. "There must be many people here from Hudley. We can stay five more minutes."

"Very well," agreed Mrs. Armitage with an air of martyrdom, settling herself in her seat again. "But it's leaving a very narrow margin for the train."

Imogen found that they might just as well have gone at once. Her own pleasure was spoilt by the necessary consultations of her watch, and eventually they had to leave with the prize song still unheard, while Beckmesser was stumbling through his stolen version of the masterpiece. Her thought for Miriam, too, proved unnecessary, for when they hastily rose she did not stir, but having murmured a brief farewell with a very preoccupied air, forthwith turned her glowing eyes from Imogen to the stage and kept them fixed there. Imogen was rather startled at first by this unexpected operatic fervour; then she smiled and decided that it was really very characteristic of her friend's thirst for knowledge.

As Mrs. Armitage and her daughter pushed past their exasperated neighbours and hurried down draughty staircases

into the cold night air, the girl realised that they had indeed left a very narrow margin of time for their train; and when the Town Hall clock boomed out in front of them she seized her mother's arm and strove to quicken her already quick pace. Mrs. Armitage hurried on gallantly for a few steps, then stopped abruptly, and said in a cold and languid tone, "We can't catch it."

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Imogen in remorse, "I'm so sorry —it's all my fault."

"It doesn't matter," said her mother with extreme bitterness. "It's all of a piece with the rest of the evening. Nothing matters nowadays." She laughed angrily, and added an aphorism of her own which never failed to madden Luke whenever she produced it: "To the poor all things are poor."

Imogen could have wept. If they missed the last train—and at this pace they certainly would—there would be nothing for it but to take a taxi back to Hudley, and she knew what Luke would think of that expensive proceeding. It was all her fault; moreover, they had lost the prize song for nothing. But beyond all this was she distressed by her mother's tone. Mrs. Armitage's manner had always been disillusioned and unenthusiastic, but in the old days it had also been composed, serene, and witty, giving the impression that she had the situation, whatever it might happen to be at the moment, well in hand. Since Johnnie's death her satiric commentary on life had too often declined into the merely querulous and bitter, and now to-night's despairing lassitude seemed to mark a degree further of deterioration. It distressed Imogen extremely, for it showed that Mrs. Armitage had found Mr. Jagger's office, and Mr. Jagger himself, and the typewriters, and the pupils, and above all Miss Hoad, far worse even than the girl had feared. The night wind blew chill across the square, and the dark deserted buildings looked grim and hostile; Imogen suddenly felt extremely tired and miserable

and quite unequal to the business of conveying herself and her mother back to Hudley, or indeed to taking any resolution of any kind. She dropped her mother's arm and looked about her despairingly.

"If we could get a taxi to the station," she murmured without hope.

At this moment a vehicle which had been running swiftly across the square suddenly drew up beside them with a prolonged shriek of brakes; the door opened; a figure precipitated itself upon them; there was a confused moment of encouraging cries and swift action; then the door slammed, the taxi bounded onwards, and Imogen found herself being borne towards the station beside her mother, with Brearley Thornton sitting opposite, consulting his watch.

"It'll be a near thing!" he exclaimed with gusto. "A close shave! Good thing I just happened to see you. I think we shall just manage to do it. Get a move on!" he shouted out of the window to the driver. "Been to the opera?" he enquired in a milder tone, throwing himself back on the small seat, which creaked beneath his weight.

Imogen's fatigue kept her silent; but Mrs. Armitage, to whom Imogen had briefly made known their companion, replied that they had been to the opera. Had Mr. Thornton also been there? Mr. Thornton, with a hearty laugh, shook his head and explained that he had been to a music-hall, second house, and run it rather late for his train.

"Here we are!" he continued cheerfully. "Now you jump out and run. I'll follow. Number two platform. I often catch this train. We shall just do it." He seized Imogen's arm and almost pushed her from the vehicle. "Got tickets?" he enquired loudly.

"Yes, yes!" cried Mrs. Armitage over her shoulder as she ran.

The guard, just about to whistle, paused with a disapprov-

ing air; a porter threw open the door of a first-class compartment and Imogen and her mother hurriedly stumbled in; to cries of "Come along, sir!" Brearley hurled himself down the platform and joined them; once again a door slammed heavily, and the train moved out.

"Close shave!" exclaimed Brearley with a cheerful smile, putting his hat on the rack above him. "Whew!" He mopped his forehead, which was beaded with perspiration. "Good thing I saw you, eh?"

"It was *indeed,*" said Mrs. Armitage with emphasis. "I'm sure I can't thank you *enough,* Mr. Thornton," she continued with a very gracious smile. "What we should have done if you hadn't appeared so opportunely I'm sure I don't know."

"It *would* have been awkward for you," agreed Brearley, sniffing cheerfully. He looked at Imogen, who sat huddled in a corner, and his smile faded. "I'm afraid Miss Armitage is very tired," he said in a kindly tone.

Imogen smiled at him, but really could not find the energy to speak. Mrs. Armitage looked at her consideringly.

"Yes, I'm afraid she is—you know this coming to Bradford every day is altogether too much for her, Mr. Thornton," she said in a confidential drawl. "It's really too absurd, all this typewriting business. But Luke seems to wish it—my son, you know—and Imogen is *so* devoted to her brother." She gave him the kind of smile which mothers give when they praise their daughters to young men, and continued to talk about Imogen. Brearley listened seriously, leaning forward with his hands clasped between his knees, nodding from time to time to show his agreement with Mrs. Armitage, and occasionally stealing a glance at the subject of their conversation.

Imogen did not listen to what they were saying; she turned away and looked out at the lights of Bradford and the dark uneven country which rolled slowly past as the train plodded

on. They reached a tunnel, and Brearley put up the window. Imogen felt stifled, and her breath came quick and fast; she told herself that she was becoming hysterical and must take her nerves in hand. In the hope of doing this she turned her thoughts to practical affairs; she was intensely relieved that they had caught the train, and meditated on the chance that had enabled them to do so. Was it sheer chance which had led Brearley to be crossing the square in a taxi at precisely the right minute for them? Undoubtedly it was as regards the opportuneness of the taxi; but Imogen was not so sure that sheer chance had led Brearley to wish to catch that last train. Thanks to Miss Hoad's silk dress she had lunched with him that day, and with his usual naïve bluntness he had carefully ascertained all her activities for the next week or more. Just then Brearley glanced across at the girl with an indescribable expression of mingled diffidence and triumph. He was so obviously pleased with the success of his simple train-catching scheme, and so obviously alarmed lest she should see through it and dislike it, that Imogen's suspicion that he admired her became a certainty.

She sighed, then smiled rather wearily as she remembered Miss Hoad and her admired Hans Sachs, and reflected that Brearley did in a way fulfil some of the conditions which Hans Sachs represented. Brearley was nine or ten years older than she was, and she had preferred a younger man, whom he had helped; he had the appearance of being decidedly attracted to her, and he was engaged in practical affairs, just as Sachs was—he spun yarn where Sachs made shoes. By stretching a point his ancestry and Johnnie's might very well be represented by that of Sachs and Walther. In one particular, however—unfortunately it was a rather important one—Brearley did not resemble Miss Hoad's idol; for whereas Hans Sachs was undoubtedly a wise man, Brearley was rather a fool. She looked at him again as the train toiled

slowly out of a dreary station, and noted his round, smooth-looking face and fresh complexion, his large light-blue eyes, the beads of perspiration standing, as they so often did, on his candid but undistinguished forehead. His fair hair was inclined to be curly in front, and it was obvious that he encouraged this inclination. Though fairly tall, he was rather plump for a young man in the early thirties, and as he was fond of eating and drinking he would probably grow rapidly plumper. The best things about him were his extremely kindly and jovial expression, which somehow managed to combine simplicity with shrewdness, and his hands, which though not slender were shapely and well kept. He wore a signet ring with which, rather to Imogen's surprise, he did not play; whenever his eyes fell on Imogen they became lively, and his large excited smile was constantly in evidence. His voice was loud and cheerful; he used simple modes of expression and spoke with a strong Yorkshire accent. Imogen had got as far as this in her observations when the train reached High Roebuck. Brearley got out amid grateful protestations from Mrs. Armitage, lingered beside Imogen's window as if loth to leave her, and then abruptly disappeared into the surrounding darkness. A minute later two bright beams of light which had been stationary just beyond the High Roebuck palings swerved and began to ascend; Brearley had evidently driven off in his car. Imogen wondered idly why he did not drive himself to and from Bradford, and yawned.

The train moved on with the inexpressibly slow and dreary motion common to stopping local trains at night—Imogen quite pitied the engine for its dogged perseverance in such a hopeless cause, for she felt convinced it would never reach Hudley. Indeed, her fatigue had become so overpowering that she rather hoped it would not, so that she might continue to lounge in her confortable corner indefinitely. Another

tunnel roared upon them, and Mrs. Armitage sighed slightly; but no word was exchanged between mother and daughter until at last, to Imogen's surprise, the familiar outlines of Hudley station presented themselves to view beneath the dull yellow light of the platform lamps. Mrs. Armitage then, pulling up her furs and laying a hand on the carriage door, observed that she thought they would take a taxi up to Royd Bank, as Imogen seemed so tired.

She uttered this remark in such full, round, cheerful tones, with such serene assurance, such lofty disregard of the petty sum of money involved—in short, so much in her old manner and so little in her recent one—that Imogen was quite taken aback, and looked at her mother in astonished enquiry. Mrs. Armitage met her daughter's gaze with her customary air of tolerant amusement, and by way of reply drawled out the perfectly relevant remark that she had invited young Mr. Thornton to come to dinner next Wednesday.

"We owe him something for all those lunches," she concluded with an arch smile at Imogen, who to her own annoyance blushed.

BOOK III

THE THORNTONS

I

If those traits which led Imogen to consider Brearley Thornton foolish were inherited, he probably received them from his mother; for his father, old John Thornton, though in some respects rather eccentric, had possessed a firm and definite personality, and had known his own mind on most subjects. A round, compact, brisk, able little man, with a mellow wit, a twinkle in his eye, rather pedantic speech and an active brain, he had been renowned locally for his excellent chairmanship of stormy assemblies. Few could resist his dry and logical yet humorous rulings, which he delivered with his hands clasped neatly across his abdomen, resembling in such moments frontispiece portraits of eighteenth-century divines. He was something of a naturalist, and a good deal of a geologist, having specimens in his collection of more than local celebrity; he was also a tremendous walker, knowing every inch of the North and West Ridings, and able to tramp his thirty miles a day over the fells up to the last three or four years of his life. He occasionally did reckless things on impulse; such an impulse had once taken him up in a balloon from York on a gala day, and he had nearly lost his life in the process of descent. But though he was celebrated for this feat, and could describe it graphically, he was not proud of it, and would call himself a fool for his pains whenever the incident was mentioned. The coming of Mr. Talland, whom he had previously seen from afar at the meetings of geological societies, to St. Mark's in Hudley, was a great pleasure to him, and a genuine affection sprang up between the two men, Mr. Thornton's strong good sense often rescu-

ing his friend from the pitfalls of his indiscriminate charity. Mrs. Thornton, too, was fond of Mr. Talland, in a slightly more patronising way than her husband; she liked to have him as a guest and give him the huge meals for which under her rule Roebuck Hall was noted. With Mrs. Talland, to whose lack of management she (quite wrongly) attributed the Reverend Francis's gaunt appearance and lustreless coat, she had little in common, and the two families, as distinct from their heads, at no time saw much of each other. After Mr. Thornton's death, which took place two years after Mr. Talland's appearance in Hudley, Johnnie being then ten and Brearley twenty-one, the Tallands and Thorntons drifted completely apart—Mr. Talland did not esteem his friend's widow highly, though on her side she often said that she would never forget the Reverend Francis's devotion to her husband during his last illness.

John Thornton had married, rather late in life, a woman much younger than himself. It was not fortunate for his two children, John Brearley and Harriet, that he died when they were comparatively young; for though he did not understand children and was rather dry with them, he was a man of sound judgment, whereas Mrs. Thornton, though good-natured and without malice, was in the sum a silly woman. She had a fund of native shrewdness which served her well enough in simple material affairs, but in any matter which required intelligence her actions were ill-judged, unbalanced, and at times almost wildly foolish. She had been a Miss Brearley, of Brearley Tyas—Brearley Tyas was a remote West Riding village—and thought sufficiently well of this fact to enshrine it in her son's second name; for though she had little education, and spoke slovenly English with a strong local accent, she had a tremendous idea of her own importance and breeding. Of middle height and solidly built, with big bones and plenty of muscle, Mrs. Thornton had abun-

dant greying hair, much too loosely arranged, and a warm complexion; when she laughed, which she did frequently and with a good heart, her large mouth revealed strong and white but uneven teeth; the expression of her rather pretty and lively grey eyes was often spoiled by a shade of stupid cunning. Her attitudes were informal and comfortable at home, but very stiff in society. As regarded the decoration of her house and person her taste was execrable, but nothing would ever make her believe this; she was fond of fine clothes, but still clung to the notions in vogue in her girlhood, and thus there was always something about her appearance rustic and startling to town-bred eyes. She had a robust appetite and an excellent digestion, liked good things to eat and understood thoroughly how to provide them; in general, her taste ran to the solid and lavish rather than to the elegant, of which, indeed, she was rather suspicious. She was incapable of dealing with more than one idea at a time, and would pursue that one idea with unyielding obstinacy. Her forecasts of people's behaviour were often surprisingly accurate, but she almost invariably attributed to it the wrong motives. She was credulous and suspicious by turns, and usually at the wrong moments; she was excitable and easily flustered, very sentimental, but with a vein of hardness and realism, thoroughly good-hearted, but capable of life-long enmity over a trifle, and an exceedingly fond and jealous mother.

Indeed, she was an egregiously fond mother; she carried her fondness to extraordinary heights, and words could not express her exalted notion of Brearley and Harriet. She considered herself particularly able in money matters, and it was a real shock to her to find that though her husband's will provided reasonably well for her, the house and mill and most of the money went to Brearley, who was exhorted to endow Harriet suitably on her marriage. Such was Mrs. Thornton's adoration for her son, however, that after the

first dismay she could not find it in her heart to resent this arrangement; but about once a quarter she made him a scene on the subject. Brearley—who was the most generous of men until he suspected he was being practised on, when he became extremely mean and cautious—was very sensitive about his father's will and the disposition of the Thornton property generally; whenever Mrs. Thornton touched upon it his facile colour rushed to his face, and he promptly raised his voice and lost his temper; the mother and son thereupon usually fell into a loud, violent, and hearty altercation, in which they took pleasure in giving as good as they got. They always felt the better for these altercations, joked about them afterwards in a friendly way, and never dreamed of bearing malice about them, for they understood each other and were happy in each other's company. Moreover, Mrs. Thornton took pride in thinking that her son's nature was a replica of her own—though she was really of coarser fibre and incapable of his lavish generosity—which again owed much to that of her mother. Well did she remember how, once far away back in the old Brearley Tyas days, when her father had given orders for the entertainment of some unexpected guests, old Mrs. Brearley had suddenly stormed into the room, and seizing the table in her strong gnarled hands, had literally overturned it, announcing amid the crash of glass that she was the mistress of that house and none should eat there unless she said so. With such a grandmother what could one expect? It was only natural that Brearley should lose his head sometimes, as she explained to the admiring Harriet, who was always greatly pleased by this mark of confidence.

Harriet was now a gentle and timid child in her early teens. Like her brother she was extremely fair, but her complexion was less florid than Brearley's, and her eyes were of warm grey instead of light blue. Her features were as yet rather indeterminate, and her character no less so; but she

had a mild open brow, and was, as Mrs. Thornton said comfortably, "very thoughtful about the house"—both of which seemed promising. Thanks to Mrs. Thornton's capricious choice of a long string of governesses, Harriet had received scarcely any education, but she was a great reader—she was excessively shy and shrank from society, and could be found at almost any hour of the day curled up on a sofa with her simple little nose buried in a book. Unfortunately her taste in literature, never having received any direction, was extremely poor; piles of cheap fiction magazines, which she had devoured, lay stacked about the house, and were always increasing, for Brearley constantly brought new ones home for her. Brearley was very fond of his sister; he petted and fondled her, called her by childish names, giggled through long evenings with her, heaped sweets upon her, and always took her side when Mrs. Thornton urged her to go out into society and Harriet did not want to go. Harriet knew practically no young people of her own age, and had no desire to do so; she was happy at home with Brearley and her mother, but when she went out she felt different from the other girls —her clothes and manners were, she realised, rustic and odd; she did not know how to alter them, nor whether she wished to alter them, but simply came home as soon as she could, with an angry ache in her perplexed young heart. After such excursions she was wont to observe at dinner, rather pathetically, that she thought it was nicest when there were just the three of them at home together. Mrs. Thornton thereupon always beamed approval, and Brearley with a sniff would agree heartily, though perhaps not quite sincerely, for at bottom Brearley was a sociable person and liked company.

He was, however, a good son to his mother, as the saying is; he bought her expensive presents, spent a good deal of time with her, and humoured, when he remembered them in

time, her little idiosyncrasies. She had a good many of these, mostly springing from her lively maternal jealousy and fondness; for example, though he had so long since reached years of discretion, she still hated him to stay out late, and often sat up for him, or even in a sudden outburst of feeling roused up the chauffeur and sent the car to fetch him—for it was another of her little fads, in Brearley's opinion, that she did not like him to drive the car, having made such a storm when he invested in a two-seater with the intention of driving it himself and leaving the large car and the man for his mother's use, that he was obliged to part with his purchase to his manager. In the old days Mrs. Thornton had, of course, kept her carriage, and she had exchanged it for a motor with extreme reluctance. Brearley thought that his mother's dislike of his driving was part of her old-established exasperation against motors as opposed to horses; but the chauffeur and the village people did not regard it quite in that light, and with his characteristic good nature Brearley usually fell in with their views on the subject, only occasionally breaking out and driving himself in defiance of the chauffeur's respectful hints.

Another fad of Mrs. Thornton's, which she shared with many other mothers of only sons, was her objection to the idea of a daughter-in-law. She protested that she had no such objection, and, indeed, she was always urging Brearley to get married; but on the two or three occasions during the past ten years when he had attempted to do so she had risen up in her might, after the manner of mothers of only sons, and benevolently foiled him; for she had yet to see, as she said to Harriet, the girl who was good enough for Brearley. Her son had been rather hot and angry about her interference at the time, but in each case his indignation had soon died down, and he good-humouredly accepted her manœuvres, and even teased her about them and made a family joke of them, for

his affections had never been very seriously engaged. Now, however, it was different; he was seriously in love with Imogen, and meant to marry her, Mrs. Thornton or no Mrs. Thornton.

This idea had occurred to him at the moment of that first glimpse of the pure oval of her face, long ago at the cinema. He had never been able to forget the soft young curve of her cheek, her cold little smile which had melted into such charming friendliness, her dark and lovely eyes. He often thought about her, and in moments when he was alone would shake his head knowingly, and admonish himself that that little girl in the picture-house was the one for him. It was on Imogen's account that he so constantly urged Johnnie to bring Luke Armitage out to Roebuck Hall; and his failure to make the Armitages' acquaintance through this highly correct and proper channel was a source of real fretfulness and irritation to him. At the time of Johnnie's death, when Mrs. Thornton informed him that she had written off at once to offer the Tallands the hospitality of Roebuck Hall, Brearley said "Quite right," and "Of course," with a heartiness which rather surprised his mother, who knew that he was distressed about the affair, and also knew that he avoided distress and complications when he could. But there again he had been foiled in his hope of a closer connection with the Armitages, and though at the inquest he had managed to scrape acquaintance with Luke, nothing further had come of it. It was all very irritating to a young man of Brearley's eager disposition, and for a time he was gloomy and petulant about it—to the great distress of his mother, who sought vainly for the cause of his clouded temper, and put it all down to that loose young scamp Johnnie Talland. Presently the natural sunniness of Brearley's disposition, aided by his habit of forgetting unpleasant things, triumphed; he grew cheerful again, and other things supplanted Imogen in his mind. The thought

of her recurred, however, whenever he chanced to fall into a sentimental mood, which he did fairly frequently—at musical comedies, for example, when the persecuted heroine sang some very touching little song about her far-away home in the mountains—and it only needed the sight of Imogen at the High Roebuck station to revive his earlier feeling in all its quite considerable strength. Since then the feeling had grown steadily; Thursday had become the most important day in his week, and the only doubt in his mind about the affair was as to Imogen's attitude towards it, which perplexed his simple mind considerably. She did not discourage him, she did not now refuse his invitations to lunch; on the other hand, he seemed as far from intimacy with her as ever—any other girl, he reflected knowingly, with a kind of irritated wonder for Imogen's indifference, would have had him safely inside Royd Bank long ago.

At the same time he was proud of this very aloofness on Imogen's part, and thought it highly distinguished and aristocratic, and very becoming in his future wife. Though Brearley teased his mother about the Brearleys of Brearley Tyas, he had quite an exalted notion of the Thorntons of Roebuck Hall (of whom there had been three generations), and he had decided that Imogen, besides being the girl of his heart, would make him an immensely suitable wife. Being himself of an unsophisticated, ingenuous, and excitable disposition, he admired immensely Imogen's cool composure, her soft level voice, her calm indifference under the public gaze of crowded restaurants, her dispassionate truthfulness, and the manner in which she guided the conversation round to yarn when he wanted to tell her that she was the prettiest girl in the West Riding. In moments when he was hungry or something else had gone wrong with him, Brearley was conscious of the fact that the household at Roebuck Hall was rustic and unpolished, and lacked *savoir faire;* and being ex-

tremely sensitive to ridicule, he writhed under the self-inflicted notion that people sometimes laughed at the High Roebuck Thorntons. Now Imogen was the opposite, the exact opposite, of the kind of thing that people laughed at; he had an immense respect for Imogen's abilities; Imogen knew how to do everything, and knew how to do it quietly and without any fuss; he was sure that no house ruled by Imogen would ever be swept by the domestic storms which ravaged Roebuck Hall when visitors were expected. When Imogen and he were married they would entertain largely in a highly calm, correct, and cosmopolitan manner; everything would be very well done, contretemps would not occur, and the most fashionable people would find nothing to jeer at. Yes, for every possible reason he had quite decided to marry Imogen, if he could only find out what the girl was driving at and whether she cared for him at all. He had moments—usually on Wednesday nights—of blithe assurance, when he imagined himself marrying Imogen within a month; he had also moments of dark doubt and depression when he thought it was all a mistake and she would never look at him. On these occasions he tried to cheer himself up by reminding himself of his excellent income, but it was no good; he shook his head with gloomy firmness over that idea, for he had long since decided that the most excellent of incomes would not weigh at all with Imogen. The meeting with Mrs. Armitage he regarded with immense satisfaction as a piece of luck which he had long been waiting for, and which he had thoroughly deserved by his skilful scheming with regard to that last train; he felt at once that excellent incomes weighed heavily with Mrs. Armitage, that she was on his side, and that marrying Imogen had now entered the realm of practical politics. These feelings showed so clearly in his face that Mrs. Armitage had risked her early invitation, and Brearley went home jubilant.

He was so elated and sure of his ground that on Wednesday evening, in the simplicity of his heart, he positively threw out a hint to his mother that he might shortly be providing her with a daughter-in-law. Mrs. Thornton threw up her hands and cried "Who is she?" in a tone between scorn for any possible daughter-in-law and admiration for Brearley's unparalleled initiative in securing one—in her eyes Brearley's behaviour was always unparalleled. She pursued him to the door with the query, but he, enjoying the joke, declined to tell her; she began to suggest names, and they both fell to laughing heartily at each of the candidates she suggested, who became more and more improbable as she went on. At last Brearley entered the car and drove off, flushed and hilarious, leaving the mystified Mrs. Thornton to spend the evening in a state of overpowering curiosity and excitement, cross-questioning the alarmed Harriet to find out whether Brearley had confided anything to her. Harriet, however, had nothing to report.

When Brearley returned, at a late hour, he looked exhausted and subdued, as if he had been through some great emotional experience; his fresh face was quite pale, his hair was pathetically dishevelled, perspiration beaded his forehead, and his hands, as they readily did, shook. He sniffed when he saw his mother sitting tense and expectant on the dining-room couch, said, "Oh, there you are!" with a sarcastic inflexion, and proceeded to mix himself a stiff whisky-and-soda from the tray awaiting him on the table. He drank this off with evident enjoyment, set the glass down with a bang, and announced with a return of some of his former jubilation that he was practically engaged to be married to Imogen Armitage.

"Imogen Armitage! I never heard of her! I didn't know you knew the Armitages!" screamed Mrs. Thornton contradictorily, almost beside herself at the shock.

Brearley, quite unperturbed, observed with a satisfied nod: "I know Imogen all right," and sniffed complacently.

Mrs. Thornton moaned, wept, screamed, heaped reproaches on her son and threw herself on his neck, where she wept again. In a rapid screech she informed him that Mrs. Armitage was the most designing woman in all Hudley; that she hadn't a penny to bless herself with and was in debt all round; that if Richard Armitage hadn't died when he did various of his clients would have prosecuted him for misappropriation of funds; that Imogen's brother was a medical student and one knew what medical students were—in any case he had been intimate with that disreputable Talland boy —and that Imogen herself was far too young to know her own mind, and was obviously marrying him for his money. "Mark my words, you'll regret it!" she prophesied hysterically.

She paused to take breath, and Brearley, who had been trying to shout her down and mix himself another drink simultaneously, intimated with some heat that he liked Mrs. Armitage as little as anybody, and that Luke was an insufferable young cub, but Imogen was entirely different, and it was Imogen he was marrying and not the rest of the family.

"Don't be too sure," Mrs. Thornton admonished him excitedly. "They'll get money out of you right and left, just see if they don't. She's marrying you for your money."

"Nonsense!" cried Brearley loudly.

His tone of disgust brought conviction to Mrs. Thornton in spite of herself, and she realized that he was in earnest about the girl. "She's good-looking," she admitted grudgingly. "I saw her once at a bridge-drive."

"Good-looking!" cried Brearley in astonishment. "She's beautiful!"

At this his mother was touched, and changed her tone. "Of course you think so, my boy," she said on a note of good-humoured raillery.

In reality she was rather impressed by Brearley's choice—it might have been very much worse, she thought, with recollections of the follies of other only sons, and certainly better than his previous attempts. She disliked Mrs. Armitage as much as any woman she had ever met, but like her son she was impressed and intimidated by the Armitage air of cool superiority and *savoir faire*. She remembered Imogen very well, for she had been struck at the time by the girl's curious name, her soft little smile and gentle manner. There was something rather distinguished about Imogen, she thought; and there was also something distinguished in Brearley's marrying a penniless girl; it showed the world that the Thorntons could afford to indulge such whims if they chose. He was obviously deeply in love with her. After a two-hours' conversation, in which they discussed the Armitages and Brearley's curious courtship from every possible angle, Mrs. Thornton was prepared to forgive Imogen on terms.

"And do you really think she cares for you, Brearley?" she pressed him.

Brearley showed a disposition to evade this question, saying that Imogen was a reserved kind of girl, not at all effusive or anything of that sort.

"She was as sweet as sugar to me to-night, at any rate," he observed at last with emphasis. "As sweet as sugar!"

He seemed quite overcome by this consideration, for his blue eyes were moist.

"Well, you'll be seeing her to-morrow morning on the train," said his mother consolingly.

"Oh no, I shan't," replied Brearley. "She isn't going to Bradford to-morrow."

"Why not?" enquired his mother, surprised.

"How should I know?" said Brearley with a kind of forlorn pride. "She just said she wasn't going, that's all. Imogen's like that—you don't always know why she does things.

By God!" he burst out abruptly with extreme feeling, "I wouldn't go through to-night again for a lot, I can tell you!"

The evening had indeed been one of extreme discomfort for all concerned. It had begun well, for with her usual light and skilful touch Mrs. Armitage had set Brearley, who reached Royd Bank feeling very nervous and self-conscious after his conversation with his mother, at ease by assuming that he and Luke had long been interested in each other and desirous of making each other's further acquaintance, and that Brearley's presence there was due to this cause. It was a fiction invented for the occasion, but it served to restore Brearley's composure—if his customary jerky manner deserved to be called by that name. Unfortunately, Luke was extremely late in arriving; he had evidently been detained in Leeds. Having invented her fiction, Mrs. Armitage felt bound to keep it up, and did not like to begin dinner without the person whom she had made the hero of the occasion. She filled in the gap rather cleverly by talking of her son, and thus making Brearley conversant with Luke's interests. Brearley at first responded gallantly, but later grew weary and let his eyes wander. Imogen, who knew how important his meals were to him and realised that he must be hungry, smiled at his suppressed yawns, which made his blue eyes nearly start out of his head, but felt sorry for him. She had hitherto been silent, but now with a quiet word she entered the conversation, and presently took an opportunity to suggest that they should wait no longer for her brother. The look of relief on Brearley's face gave Mrs. Armitage her cue, and soon the three were seated round the table, and the comfort of the evening seemed restored.

The conversation was chiefly between Brearley and Mrs. Armitage, who discussed mutual acquaintances with zest; Mrs. Armitage seemed to enjoy Brearley's blunt comments, while Brearley himself laughed heartily at her neat witti-

cisms, throwing himself back in his chair to do so. Though he talked with her, however, he looked at Imogen; he had not seen the girl indoors before, and he simply could not keep his eyes away from her—she was more beautiful even than he had imagined. Although it was a nice little dinner, such as he liked—the wine was good—and to a casual observer he might have appeared to eat heartily, it was really all he could do to keep his attention fixed on such mechanical trifles as his glass and plate, and respond suitably to Jennifer's attentions; his eyes constantly strayed to Imogen, her pale face and dark lustrous hair, her beautiful rounded arms, the soft rise and fall of her breast; and he told himself with greater emphasis than ever before that she was the girl for him, and the sooner the better.

Imogen was, as usual, outwardly serene and inscrutable; and, indeed, she felt no agitation, and was able to conduct a long argument with herself with a calm and even mind. It seemed to her now quite certain that she would shortly be called on to decide whether or no she would marry Brearley Thornton—the look in his eyes, which had something of the pathetic faithfulness of a devoted dog, told her that. She was by no means so sure what she should say to him. She wished she could have had the benefit of Miriam's advice on the subject, but Miriam had not been at Mr. Jagger's since the night of the opera; it appeared, in answer to Imogen's hurried note, that she had caught a cold. The obvious thing to do with Brearley was to discourage and ultimately refuse him. Imogen had loved Johnnie, and he was dead, and she could never love anybody else, and therefore she could not marry—that line of argument was perfectly clear, and recommended itself to Imogen with all the force of that feeling of hers for poor Johnnie. But there were some considerations and persons which advanced themselves on the other side. There was Miss Hoad, constantly urging her to refuse to be

prostrated by a single stroke of fate. Supposing one accepted her view, and took up the burden of living for others, there then arose other people. There arose, for example, Brearley himself; if he really loved Imogen and wanted her, would it not be a true kindness, a worthy deed, to marry him? (Brearley had been kind to Johnnie—"I shall always be grateful to him, always!" Johnnie had said.) There was also Mrs. Armitage, whose zest for life had quite returned during the last few days. She had become lively and cheerful and full of enterprise; the brilliancy of her repartee had emerged from its long cloud; her figure was more erect, her drawl had lost its fretfulness; nor was there any doubt in Imogen's mind as to the reason for this renewed verve. It came to this: Imogen had had the best and lost it, and could never be perfectly happy again in any circumstances, whether she married Brearley or not; so that if marrying Brearley would make him happy and Mrs. Armitage happy, why not do it? The notion that to marry Brearley would be disloyal to Johnnie simply made Imogen give her sad little smile; her love for Johnnie was in a sacred, remote place, far above disloyalty or any earthly thing of that kind. Then, too, Brearley was so utterly different from Johnnie—so deficient in all that had made Johnnie admirable to Imogen—that Imogen in her youthful inexperience did not see how any tepid affection she might feel for him could possibly trespass on the flaming glory of her first love. Brearley knew all about Johnnie, and had been kind to him. It would be much easier not to marry Brearley, of course; but, thanks to Miss Hoad, Imogen rather thought it would be finer, more courageous, and less selfish to marry him and drink the cup of life than to turn from it in disdain. For supposing she did not marry, but remained aloof, hugging her tragedy to her barren breast, what had life to offer her? Imogen knew one or two women who had remained aloof, hugging their tragedy to their breasts all their lives.

There was, for example, Jennifer. Such people seemed to walk apart under a shadow, and look at everything from odd and inhuman points of view; they had a grievance against life, and it hardened their hearts and sharpened their voices and made their faces ugly; they were dry and withered, embittered and not lovable; children did not like them, and their elders said excusingly: "She has such a sad story, dear." A slight shudder shook Imogen's bare shoulders. Mrs. Armitage murmured an enquiry about the draught, and Jennifer drew the curtains closer. Imogen very definitely did not want to be a woman with a sad story for the rest of her life—all her youth cried out against it; after all, there was such a lot of her life left. It would be far, far better, she thought, to do as Miriam had so courageously done, gather herself up after her disaster and step out into the sunny market-place again, make the best of what life offered, and share the common joys and sorrows instead of remaining aloof and apart in the lifelong shadow of a grievance. Johnnie admired courage tremendously; Johnnie would far rather see her a gracious wife than a thin, sharp-featured spinster with a grievance—like Jennifer. The front door banged, and Luke's heavy footsteps could be heard in the hall. Imogen looked up at the sound, and encountered Brearley's blue eyes fixed upon her in delighted wonder. In a sharp revulsion she recoiled from her own carefully argued conclusions; there was a great gulf, she felt, between theory and practice. In Miss Hoad's case common necessity, and love of Ivy, had driven Miriam across the gulf; in her own case Imogen did not quite see where the impulse to bridge it was to come from.

The door opened and Luke came in, looking tired and preoccupied. At the sight of Brearley he gave a perceptible start of astonishment, and hesitated on the threshold; it was

evident from his face that he had entirely forgotten, if, indeed, he had ever taken in, the information that Thornton was dining there that night. His heavy glance rested in turn on Mrs. Armitage's pearls, the remains of the nice little dinner, Jennifer in waiting, Imogen's evening frock, and Brearley's look of embarrassment, and his face darkened ominously. There was a brief pause of considerable tension; Luke then advanced slowly, and took his guest's hand with marked reluctance.

"I think we've met before," said Brearley, with a nervous laugh.

Imogen winced, remembering the occasion of their meeting, and Luke said dryly: "I believe so."

His cold and most unfriendly tone completely shattered the pleasant fiction of the two men's mutual interest, and for a moment there was a general feeling of awkwardness. Imogen, distressed and puzzled by her brother's rudeness, looked at him in wide-eyed astonishment; Brearly coloured and began to perspire; while Mrs. Armitage, biting her lip, made a pleasant remark about Luke's devotion to duty and looked daggers at her son, who returned her angry glance with interest.

From that moment there began a species of martyrdom for the unfortunate Brearley. Luke was not usually very talkative in company, but to-night he kept the conversation in his hands; he talked about music, art, the drama, and economics to his mother and sister, while Brearley sat silent and abashed, out of his depth; suddenly Luke would turn to him and put him some large question, the stumbling reply to which betrayed Brearley's total ignorance of the subject in hand. If the answer was vague and so passable, Luke persisted relentlessly in his enquiries till he received a reply whose ineptitude satisfied him. He then said, "Ah!" thought-

fully, and Brearley grew a degree hotter and more uncomfortable, and his replies a degree more foolish, until at last he positively writhed with humiliation, and dared not look at Imogen to see how she was taking it. He grew so confused at length that he became clumsy, dropped a fork or so, and finally upset his glass—Luke's polite regret at this was maddening. In a gust of rage Brearley raised his voice and tried to give sarcasm for sarcasm, but the odds were too unequal, and he was helpless in his adversary's hand. Imogen was silent, but Mrs. Armitage roused herself in defence of her guest, and used every weapon known to her; she tried to turn to topics within Brearley's reach, hit sarcastically at Luke whenever he gave her an opening, associated herself falsely with Brearley's opinions—"I'm afraid Mr. Thornton and myself must plead ignorance of that, my dear boy," she observed with her most amiable smile for Brearley —and finally rebuked her son openly. "You're very severe to-night, Luke," she said in her fatigued drawl, her glance full of menace. It was a battle between Mrs. Armitage and her son, and Luke's onslaught was so savage, so direct, and so unscrupulous that she could do nothing against it. Realising this, she attempted to get rid of her son's presence; she said with a simulated maternal smile that they would leave Luke to finish his meal at his leisure, and when Luke promptly said that he had already finished, she suggested that he had work to do, and turning to Brearley dwelt on her son's studies, lightly touching in a hint that so much work made him difficult and exacting. "These clever young men, you know!" she said with a smile, implying that the clever young men's elders—herself and Brearley—knew a thing or two more than they did. Luke, however, was not to be disposed of in this fashion; in an airy tone of irony which was really insulting, he said that his work could wait till another less important day, and accom-

panied the others to the drawing-room, where he continued his business of tormenting his guest.

"Do you play bridge, Mr. Thornton?" he enquired maliciously.

"Well—a little," replied the wretched Brearley, squirming uncomfortably in his chair.

"Splendid! We'll have a rubber," cried Luke, falsely genial. He rose and began to pull forward the card-table eagerly, while his guest, seeing further abysses of humiliation yawn before him, gave a harassed sigh.

As Luke passed Imogen she leaned forward and put a hand on his arm.

"I think we might have the wireless on instead, Luke," she suggested quietly.

She had been silent for so long that the other three were all startled by the sound of her voice, and looked at her in surprise. She was very pale, and there was something in her glance which caused Luke to leave the card-table where it was.

"Very well," he agreed gruffly. "Just as you like."

In a tone of comparative mildness he informed Brearley that the apparatus was in the other room, and went out to attend to it. Mrs. Armitage, murmuring with a smile, "Oh, I must explain to him about the new battery," suddenly swept after him; she felt that to do so was gauche and childish in the extreme, but anger drove her on. She entered the dining-room on Luke's heels, and closed the door firmly behind her.

"Do you want me, Mother?" enquired Luke with ironical politeness.

"I want to know what you are about this evening, Luke," replied Mrs. Armitage in a tone of concentrated fury. "How dare you be so rude to a guest in my house?"

"It's easy to see what *you're* about," retorted Luke with

no less anger, his eyes gleaming dangerously behind his glasses. "And if I can stop it I will."

"Perhaps you'll kindly tell me what ridiculous notion you've got in your head?" suggested Mrs. Armitage contemptuously.

"You're trying to marry Imogen to that Thornton fellow, and I won't have it," said Luke, facing her squarely.

"And why not?" demanded his mother.

"He's too old for her, and he's a fool, that's why," replied Luke.

"He's a very kindly, good-natured fellow, and will make Imogen an excellent husband if she's lucky enough to get him," countered Mrs. Armitage.

"I know he's got plenty of money," said Luke grimly. "I think that's what you mean, isn't it? I've always suspected you meant to do this kind of thing with Imogen, Mother, and you can understand from me, once and for all, I will not have it."

"Understand from *me,* Luke, that this is my house," cried his infuriated mother. "And while you're in it you'll kindly behave with courtesy to my guests."

"Perhaps you'd like me to leave the house?" suggested Luke, a dark flush on his face.

"Don't be ridiculous, Luke," drawled Mrs. Armitage with a slight laugh, suddenly regaining her temper. "This is all very absurd. I should never dream of trying to make Imogen marry a man she didn't want to marry—how could I, in this century? Imogen has seen Brearley Thornton a good deal lately, on the Bradford trains, and had lunch with him in Bradford—it was *your* idea that she should go to Bradford, you know, Luke. What more natural than that we should return his hospitality? There's no question of marrying yet."

"There soon will be," muttered Luke.

"Well, if it should come to that I won't deny I should be pleased," said his mother, her composure quite restored. "I think it would be a very suitable match for her."

"And I *don't,*" said Luke emphatically.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Armitage with bitterness, "you'd rather she'd married Johnnie Talland."

Luke met her gaze steadily, and answered in a determined tone: "Yes, I would."

"Well, I would *not,*" cried his mother, an intense feeling animating her usual cool drawl, "because I know what it means to be married to a poor man. Do you suppose I've enjoyed educating you two and keeping this house up on nothing a year? You think it's very clever of you to be always hinting that I'm extravagant, and preaching economy; do you imagine I like unpaid bills? I can assure you I don't. I know quite well that we don't live within our income, and that I'm spending my capital and shall have to suffer for it later; I've done it deliberately all these years solely in order that Imogen should have the chance of meeting and marrying some man in a decent position, and never go through what I've had to do. And then, first, there was that dreadful Talland affair, which nearly broke my heart and has taken all the bloom from Imogen; and now, when there really does seem a chance of her being comfortably settled in life, instead of helping me you take to behaving in this ridiculous, childish, exasperating fashion! I should like to know what you mean by insulting a guest of mine in that way?"

The passionate sincerity of his mother's justification of her conduct, and the revelation of her generous, if mistaken, sacrifices for himself and Imogen, upset poor Luke so much that he did not know what to say. Indeed, there seemed nothing, as her son, that he could decently say; he stared at her in bewilderment, feeling that she had cut the ground

from beneath his feet, and stammered chokingly a few words which Mrs. Armitage chose to regard as an apology.

"Very well, then please have more sense in future," she said as if mollified. "Remember that you're only a boy, Luke, with no experience of life; and leave Imogen's affairs to me."

"All the same, you're wrong," cried Luke obstinately, finding his tongue at last. "You're wrong, I know you are." He hesitated, much perplexed, and frowned, then added: "Will you give me your word not to try to persuade Imogen to marry Thornton?"

His mother laughed.

"Will you?" persisted Luke doggedly.

"My dear boy, how very absurd you are," said Mrs. Armitage in her customary tone of tolerant amusement. "Certainly I will, on the understanding that I have your word not to try to turn her against it. Will you give me that, please?"

Luke scowled and hesitated, glaring at Mrs. Armitage in perplexity. Quick decisions were not his *forte*. He measured his own powers and opportunities of persuasion against his mother's, and said sullenly at length, with a sense of defeat: "Very well."

His mother gave a light sigh of relief.

"Now do put that instrument on quickly," she urged, "And come back and be sensible; or he'll think we're all mad."

Luke, who was extremely proud of his wireless installation, rapidly made the necessary adjustments, and the concluding bars of a syncopated strain abruptly flooded the house.

When the door closed behind Mrs. Armitage in her angry flight to Luke, Imogen had risen and moved towards the fireplace, extending her hands to the blaze. For the last

half-hour she had hardly been able to keep still under the urge of her increasing anger against Luke. Not understanding the motive of his behaviour to Brearley, she thought it simply detestable, and was really ashamed that her brother should conduct himself so atrociously to a guest in his own house. Imogen did not need Luke to teach her that Brearley was rather a fool, for she knew it already; but in her eyes that made her brother's behaviour all the worse, for a weak and defenceless person was surely one whom nobody with a grain of chivalry would dream of attacking. What business was it of Luke's, in any case, that Brearley was not very intelligent or well-informed? Was Luke himself so clever that he could afford to laugh at a fool! Imogen rather thought not; and she really felt tempted to remind her brother that he had twice failed in his examinations. Brearley had never done the Armitages any harm, and he had been extremely kind to Johnnie. Imogen remembered with renewed resentment what she had made many efforts to forget, namely, that Luke had not been altogether kind to Johnnie, for he had refused, that last day at Leeds, to lend him the money which would have saved his life. To-night's experience seemed to show that his refusal might have been uttered with barbarous harshness. At this thought the deeps of Imogen's nature were stirred into a lasting anger against Luke, and a wave of warm and generous compassion for his unfortunate victim swept over her. Brearley was standing beside her with a disconsolate and harassed air, his fresh face dejected, his blue eyes miserable. She turned impulsively to him and said in an earnest little tone: "I don't think we've ever thanked you properly, Mr. Thornton, for your kindness to us the other night in Bradford. We should never have caught the train without your help."

"Not at all," stammered Brearley with an embarrassed sniff. "It was a pleasure—kindness to myself." Encouraged by Imogen's smile, he suddenly blurted out ruefully: "I'm afraid your brother doesn't like me, Miss Armitage."

"Oh!" exclaimed Imogen, really distressed. "I'm so sorry you think that." She hesitated, coloured, then added with a frankness which had a real dignity of its own: "I don't know why Luke's so disagreeable to-night, I'm sure—I must apologise for him."

"Oh no! Don't, please!" cried Brearley in haste, alarmed. "I didn't come to see *him,* you know," he added mildly.

Imogen said nothing, and Brearley, glancing eagerly into her dark eyes, saw no displeasure there. Suddenly excited and emboldened, he took a rapid step towards her, jingled the keys in his pocket, and, exclaiming in a loud cheerful tone: "I don't bear him any ill-will for it, you know!" laughed uproariously. Seeing that she did not join in the joke, he tried to explain that Luke's being Imogen's brother was the reason for his lack of malice towards him, but somehow he could not make it clear; he lost himself in embarrassed personalities, and grew hot and flurried. "You know what I mean," he cried at length in confusion, much distressed by the failure of his compliment.

Imogen looked at him and smiled.

"I can't imagine you thinking unkindly of anyone," she told him gently, remembering his dealings with Johnnie.

The nearness of her beauty, and the sound of her soft voice saying the kindest words he had ever heard from her, made Brearley lose his head completely; exclaiming "Imogen!" in a voice which shook, he suddenly seized her hands and kissed them passionately.

"Oh no, oh no!" cried Imogen in alarm, trying to withdraw them from his hot grasp.

Brearley, however, was stronger than she, and he had no

scruple about retaining them. Fortunately for his cause he did not attempt any further embrace, but clutching her hands tightly and fixing his excited blue eyes on Imogen's he shouted triumphantly in her ear that he had always known she was the girl for him, always! Yes, from the very first! Perspiration stood in beads on his forehead as he babbled ecstatically of his love for her; he laughed between his disjointed phrases, and his expression of childish triumph was pitiful to Imogen, who, trembling and with averted eyes, murmured faintly that he must understand she could not give him love. Brearley was far too excited to understand a word she was saying, and cried incoherently in a loud soothing tone that that was all right, and they would be married soon.

"No, no!" cried Imogen in a panic at this, turning to face him. "I must have time to consider it—I must indeed."

"Oh, of course, of course," agreed Brearley light-heartedly, with his cheerful laugh. "Get to know each other better first, eh?"

Imogen gave a tremulous "Yes." She again tried to withdraw her hands, and this time Brearley had the sense to release them, which he did with a reluctant sigh.

Imogen at once sank on to the couch, and sat there with head bowed, feeling faint and nerveless, while Brearley stood balancing from one foot to the other, afraid to touch her, but looking down at her in a lively satisfaction and murmuring tender, though incoherent, exclamations. Suddenly loud chords smote upon the air, making them both start and exclaim, and Mrs. Armitage and Luke could be heard approaching along the hall.

"Well," said Brearley, half laughing, half genuinely perplexed, "just tell me now, Imogen—" he dwelt lovingly on her name, which he slightly mispronounced—"are we engaged, or are we not?"

In spite of her distress Imogen could not help giving a soft little laugh as she answered "Certainly not."

Brearley shook his head at her reproachfully as Mrs. Armitage entered the room, but his smile was jubilant; he felt that his cause was as good as won if only that young cub of a brother would cease to interfere.

Imogen, too, felt that she had crossed her gulf and begun a new life.

II

To Imogen's astonishment she and Brearley were married in the early summer.

Imogen really did not know how this hasty consummation had been brought about. She had expected a long and gradual courtship, during which her life should go on as usual while she considered the question of marriage, but in the event she did not visit Mr. Jagger's office more than once or twice—Miriam was not there when she did so—and the whole current of her life was changed. To her surprise Brearley regarded himself as an accepted suitor, and very soon began to talk about an early wedding; whereupon Mrs. Armitage, who had hitherto kept her promise to Luke in the letter if not in the spirit, said to Imogen that if she had made up her mind to marry Brearley Thornton she might as well do it at once; there was nothing to wait for. In reality both Mrs. Armitage and Brearley had a lurking fear that Imogen might change her mind, and as they both wished to put it out of her power to do so, they worked together in quite remarkable harmony. Mrs. Thornton for a time went about prophesying evil speed from so much haste, and she was fond of telling her relations that Brearley had got engaged before she knew he had even met the girl in question, but in reality her forebodings were not as dismal as she pretended. She disliked Mrs. Armitage rather more than ever, but she admired Imogen, and liked the girl's manner to herself. It was well understood between Brearley and his mother that Mrs. Thornton and Harriet should leave Roebuck Hall to him on his marriage, and go to live in a smaller but adequate

house named Roebuck Dene, which stood near by. Imogen was distressed at the thought of turning Mrs. Thornton out of her home, and expressed her reluctance strongly to Brearley. Brearley, of course, repeated what she said to his mother, and Mrs. Thornton was much mollified, though she suggested sceptically to Harriet that Imogen's concern was merely assumed, and that she would have been surprised if they had taken her at her word. Harriet, however, believed firmly that Imogen's concern was genuine, and at the bottom of her heart Mrs. Thornton thought so too.

Harriet shed a good many tears over her brother's engagement. At first she wept because from her mother's wild talk she pictured Imogen as a cruel, hard, mercenary girl, who had got hold of poor Brearley and was going to make them all dreadfully unhappy. After she had seen Imogen she wept from sheer envious admiration. She admired Imogen intensely—her hair, eyes, complexion, voice, smile, clothes, and general behaviour seemed to poor Harriet absolute perfection, and to be like her the summit of bliss. Imogen, rather preoccupied by the novelty of her position and the cares of her approaching wedding, thought Harriet a nice little thing, but somehow did not find much time for her, and Harriet suffered under this quite unconscious neglect. She conceived the morbid notion that she was inferior to the Armitages—she felt plain, gawky, odd, and not well-bred when they were there—and it was a real tragedy to her, especially as Brearley, who was himself sensitive in this respect, occasionally threw out mild criticisms of Harriet's dress and behaviour, and urged his mother to tidy her up a bit when they were going to Royd Bank. Harriet was thrown into an ecstasy when Imogen of her own accord suggested that the child should be a bridesmaid; Brearley was delighted, and even Mrs. Thornton observed that Richard Armitage must have been a decent sort of

fellow after all. Harriet did not understand this allusion, but Brearley enjoyed it, for though in order to win Imogen he submitted to the demands of his future mother-in-law, he chafed under them, and had his own idea of the amount of visiting at Roebuck Hall which Imogen's mother should do once they were married.

The seal was set on Harriet's adoration for Imogen on the occasion of the party's first visit to the dressmaker's to try on their wedding garments. Harriet had set out for this great occasion in high spirits, chattering blithely; but when, having met the Armitages, they repaired to a stylish dressing-room and were attended by very superior persons who proceeded to clothe Imogen in shimmering white, the child fell silent, overawed—the combination of Mrs. Armitage and the attendants was altogether too much for her; and when she realised that she would presently have to submit to the assistants' ministrations herself she turned pale, really terrified.

"Come, Harriet, child, get your dress off quickly," Mrs. Thornton admonished her.

Poor Harriet hung her head, but was obliged to obey, and her immature childish figure was revealed in a curious collection of old-fashioned underclothes, most of them rather dirty and in need of mending. Her mother coloured angrily, and twitched at her skirts in a vain attempt to conceal their defects, which simply attracted attention to them, while Mrs. Armitage put up her lorgnette and permitted herself to smile—she knew Mrs. Thornton's and Brearley's dislike of her well enough, endured it for Imogen's sake, and took her revenge in such small pricks. The mortified Harriet saw the smile, and wished she had never been born; ready to sink into the earth with shame, she stole an anguished glance at Imogen, and found her beautiful face grave, calm, and serious, as always. In a burst of grateful affection Harriet

felt that she understood why Brearley loved Imogen; and ever after she hung fondly about her future sister-in-law and took her side to such an extent that Mrs. Thornton became positively jealous.

On the day when Brearley first put on Imogen's finger a colossal diamond ring, Luke flung himself out of the house and remained away for some hours. When he returned, looking white and haggard, he behaved with calm kindness to Imogen, kissing her and offering congratulations in the approved conventional style. But Imogen suspected irony in his tone, and there was indeed a deep rift between the brother and sister. Though Luke was considerate and gentle in manner towards Imogen throughout this period, and most helpful in all the arrangements for the wedding, his kindness was not spontaneous, but the result of self-control. Imogen wished to explain to him her motives in marrying Brearley, but at her first word Luke stopped her, saying that she had a right to do as she liked, and was not answerable to him for her actions. At her exclamation of dismay he enquired stiffly whether she had anything to complain of in his conduct, and Imogen sadly shook her head, for he now behaved with perfect amiability and courtesy to the Thorntons. He avoided his future brother-in-law as much as possible, for Brearley had not forgiven him and never liked him; but he was especially nice to Mrs. Thornton, whose feelings he seemed to understand. Indeed, it became a kind of joke at Royd Bank to allot Mrs. Thornton to Luke on ceremonial occasions. Mrs. Thornton liked Luke, saying sometimes to Brearley that of the three Armitages he was the most honest and had least affectation; she felt Luke's opposition to the Thornton-Armitage match, and respected him for it. Brearley, however, was not to be convinced.

The wedding was a grand affair, worthy of the bride of a Thornton of Roebuck Hall. The day was one of calm

sunshine, and Imogen, as everyone agreed, looked particularly lovely. Mrs. Armitage was a woman of good taste, but that day she had much ado to keep her jubilation within decent bounds, nor was she altogether successful in her attempts; her voice, her smile, her eyes, the very way she held her head, all revealed her intense pride and satisfaction; the occasion was one long triumph for her. The only mishap of the day befell poor Harriet, who tripped over a ruck in the red carpet as she ascended the church steps and damaged her bouquet in saving herself from a fall. Fortunately, Mrs. Thornton was already inside the building and did not see her, and the other bridesmaids soothed Harriet's ruffled feelings as well as they could; while during the ceremony the child was so engaged in trying to look serene and as if she had not fallen that she forgot to weep over her loss of Brearley, which was perhaps as well.

Imogen sent Miss Hoad an invitation to the wedding. She had meant to deliver it in person, or, at least, enclose a note with it, but somehow in the rush of preparations there was never time to do either. Throughout the ceremony she imagined Miriam, clad in her new silk dress, to be present among the crowd, looking at Imogen from her glowing eyes and smiling approvingly her beautiful smile; and this thought gave the girl pleasure; so that it was a great disappointment to her later not to be able to find her friend among the guests. She feared that Miriam must be ill, but was whirled away to the station before she had time to ascertain, by looking at the heap of notes, whether Miriam had replied to her card or not.

The honeymoon was passed in Scotland. Brearley had wished to spend it in a motor tour, and Imogen, too, had thought that attractive; but Mrs. Thornton was so emphatically against the plan that it had to be given up. Mrs. Thornton suggested Venice as an alternative. She was annoyed when

Mrs. Armitage, with her customary air of superior knowledge, told her that the season of the year made Venice impossible; but Imogen was glad that it was so—Venice and all that Venice stood for belonged, she felt, to Johnnie, and had nothing to do with Brearley Thornton. She had given all that side of life up in marrying him, and did not wish to be reminded of it.

In Scotland Imogen discovered a good many traits in Brearley which had hitherto been unknown to her. She found out, for example, that his fondness for good things to drink really required curbing if it were not to prove detrimental, and she decided to curb it with the most consummate tact. She also discovered, in the course of a brief but informative afternoon when they drove out in a hired car, why his mother had opposed the idea of a motor tour. Imogen was not a nervous motorist, but on this occasion she made up her mind that driving a car was one of the things she would never allow Brearley to do if she could prevent it. She had the good sense not to let him suspect either of these decisions on her part, however, and this made Brearley feel all the more strongly what a perfect wife she was. Brearley adored his wife, and was tremendously proud of her beauty and her taste; indeed, his too public manifestations of his pride in her sometimes made Imogen colour and wince, though the intensity of his feeling touched her. Though Brearley liked other people to admire his wife, however, he was also wildly jealous; in the middle of their honeymoon, apropos of some small incident or other, he suddenly made her a violent scene on this subject, during which he shouted at her and the veins stood out on his crimsoning forehead. Imogen was perfectly astounded; she had never seen anybody behave like that before, and had no idea that people could do so. She was still more astounded at the end of a few minutes to find herself weeping; if anyone had told her three months or

even one month ago that any Thornton had the power to make her weep she would have smiled scornfully, but it was astonishing how important even Brearley could be when one was married to him. At the sight of her tears Brearley was abruptly stricken with a remorse as violent as his rage; he knelt beside her and implored her forgiveness, almost weeping himself, and saying very affectionate, if foolish, things, so that after their reconciliation Imogen felt more than ever that her life was now bound up with his.

During her honeymoon Imogen often reflected with considerable bitterness that if she had been a little older and had had more knowledge of life she would not have rushed quite as hastily as she had done into marriage with a man she did not love; but when the Thorntons had returned and settled down in Roebuck Hall she decided that Miss Hoad's prescription was on the whole a good one. She discovered Harriet, and became fond of the child, finding in her all the qualities she liked in Brearley, and few of those she regretted. Then, too, Imogen had now a place in the scheme of things, and very definite duties were required of her; also the mere fact that she was alive was intensely important to Brearley, and she was necessary to his happiness. She had married Brearley in order to be a good wife to him, and she took considerable care in providing him with the lavish meals he loved, playing lively music—he had given her a grand piano as a wedding present, at Mrs. Armitage's suggestion —to him at night, and other such important trifles. Brearley was delighted with her constant serene calm; he boasted to his friends that his wife's temper was always the same—there were no teacup storms at Roebuck Hall. The couple entertained considerably and with the correctness Brearley so much desired, Imogen being in her husband's eyes the perfect hostess. Imogen also, to Brearley's pride and amusement, took a substantial part in village activities; charitable

societies held ther meetings in the drawing-room of Roebuck Hall, and young Mrs. Thornton was in great request to distribute prizes and open bazaars. Imogen knew that these were the secondary things of life, but it was to make the best of the secondary things that she had married Brearley; she valiantly carried out her programme, and with one thing and another found plenty to occupy and interest her. The furnishings of Roebuck Hall, for example, were curiously uneven; the rooms were crowded with all manner of things, excellent pieces being cheek by jowl with shoddy, and the whole overlaid with Mrs. Thornton's recent attempts to be fashionable, which consisted of flaming pseudo-Oriental cushions and stuffed velvet animals perched about in unlikely places. The congestion amongst the furniture had been somewhat relieved by Mrs. Thornton's withdrawal to Roebuck Dene, and Imogen enjoyed bringing the remainder more into conformity with her own ideas. In the library were large cases containing old Mr. Thornton's geological and botanical specimens, which had become somewhat mouldy and dejected-looking with the passage of the years; Imogen persuaded Brearley to have them cleaned, and took a mournful pleasure—mournful because of the association with Mr. Talland—in rearranging them herself. The garden was similarly a great pleasure to her. Imogen had previously known nothing of gardens, so she was able to accept Mrs. Thornton's advice on the subject wholeheartedly. Whatever improvement Imogen desired, she had usually only to say the word and the infatuated Brearley had it instantly performed; occasionally, however, after agreeing cheerfully to a scheme involving a considerable cost, he would jib at some trifling detail and to Imogen's alarm make a tremendous storm about it.

One afternoon, for instance, Imogen was standing bareheaded in the drive, talking to the gardener about the beds

which bordered it, when Brearley appeared at the wicket-gate on the far side of the garden which led to the short cut from Thornton Mills. Imogen waved to him; he crossed the grass and joined in the conversation, and Imogen explained her plans for the beds next spring. The expense involved was merely the price of a few dozen bulbs, but Brearley suddenly fell into a fury; he kicked angrily at the gardener's shears, and shouted some incoherent remarks about wool sales and the price of yarn which led Imogen to fear that he had been losing money. She put her hand into the crook of his arm and walked him up the path away from the gardener, and as soon as they were out of the man's hearing asked him if he had really had losses, and if they ought to economise.

"Everyone's losing money in the West Riding just now," growled Brearley, somewhat soothed by the touch of her hand.

Imogen promptly suggested that they could dispense with one of the maids.

"Don't be silly!" cried Brearley in a tone of fond exasperation. "You are silly sometimes, Imogen."

"But if you've lost——" began Imogen.

"I can afford to lose a bit without its mattering," said Brearley complacently. "But I've spent enough this year," he resumed on a rising note, his irritation returning. "It costs a pretty penny to get married, let me tell you, Imogen."

Imogen dropped his arm and stared at him with dilated eyes; it came to her in a lurid flash that for her grand wedding and elegant trousseau Brearley had paid the bills. Her cheeks burned; now that she saw it she could not understand how she had not seen it before, and an intense resentment against Mrs. Armitage rose in her heart.

"However, we'll have the bulbs," muttered Brearley, with a sidelong glance at her.

His embarrassed flush and the apologetic expression of his eyes told Imogen that her suspicion was justified; he saw she suspected the truth and was ashamed of having allowed her to divine it. With a sharp exclamation she turned from him and ran into the house. Brearley did not follow her, for which she was grateful, and she was able to give her sore heart the relief of solitary tears.

When husband and wife met later at dinner the matter was not mentioned again between them, but Brearley's manner was exceptionally tender and apologetic, and Imogen was touched; for no apology was due from him—the fault lay entirely on the Armitage side. She tried to break through her reserve and tell him so, but before she was successful Mrs. Thornton and Harriet came in, as they often did in the evenings. Mrs. Thornton glanced curiously at her daughter-in-law, whose eyes revealed that she had been weeping, and Imogen felt humbled to the dust before her.

"Have you got a headache, Imogen?" enquired her mother-in-law at length, accenting the middle syllable of the girl's name, with which, indeed, none of the Thorntons seemed able to cope.

"If you want to know, we've been quarrelling about some bulbs," intervened Brearley with his cheerful smile.

Mrs. Thornton laughed comfortably, reassured, and offered some mildly jocular remarks about the quarrels of newly married couples. With an effort Imogen conjured up a faint smile in reply. She felt that she was utterly alone; she had lost Johnnie, she could not count on Luke, and now a great gulf had yawned between herself and her mother. This feeling oppressed her the more because Mrs. Armitage and Luke were physically absent. Once Imogen was fairly settled in Roebuck Hall, Mrs. Armitage went off on a round of visits, and then betook herself to a south-country seaside resort; she had let her house, and was to be absent for

three months at least. Since Imogen's wedding-day Mrs. Armitage had grown progressively younger and more lively, as if the more she thought about it the better pleased she felt; and her manner indicated rather too obviously that after such a splendidly successful campaign she felt she could rest on her laurels and enjoy herself. Meanwhile, Jennifer returned to her East Yorkshire home for a long-promised holiday, and Luke had settled himself in lodgings in Leeds. Imogen had yearned for Mrs. Armitage, and felt lonely without her; now she did not yearn for her, and felt lonelier still. Mrs. Thornton continued to make jokes, not in the best of taste, but kindly in intention, on Imogen and the bulbs, till Harriet, who was sitting beside Imogen on the couch in one of her untidy attitudes, suddenly threw her arms round her sister-in-law's neck and cried: "Don't tease her, Mother!"

Brearley gave a sympathetic sniff, and looked at the two girls with his head on one side, as if he found the picture pleasing. It came home to Imogen that her mother and Luke and Johnnie were for ever lost, and her husband and Harriet alone remained to her. But Brearley and Harriet emphatically did remain; they loved her, and Harriet's affectionate embrace and Brearley's look had brought some warmth to her desolate heart; she put her lips to the child's soft cheek, and abandoned herself, with a kind of determined recklessness, to being a Thornton and forgetting her mother's house.

III

In the autumn Imogen found she could regard Brearley in a new light, as the father of her expected child; and, beside this surpassing new interest, the figures of Luke and Mrs. Armitage shrank and dwindled, and even Johnnie's became dim. She threw herself with new zest into all Brearley's affairs, and amongst other things took Harriet thoroughly in hand; she taught her how to sew, and tried to direct her reading and overhaul her wardrobe without offending Mrs. Thornton.

She was successful in not offending Mrs. Thornton, but not very successful in her mission for Harriet's happiness; for Brearley, who now had higher standards of comparison, had lately begun to be rather severe on the child; Mrs. Thornton defended her in public, but scolded her in private, and Imogen herself found Harriet's sudden loud giggle and ignorance of the rudiments of manners rather embarrassing. After a good deal of thought she suggested to Brearley that it might make for Harriet's welfare to send her away to a good school for a year or two. At this Brearley was upset; he had never been away to school himself—Mrs. Thornton had made her husband a scene every time the proposal had come up for discussion—and he did not see why poor Harriet should be packed off out of the way of all the fun, as he expressed it. At the same time he could not help admitting that Imogen's manner, which he so much admired, had been formed with the aid of a boarding-school, and that something ought to be done promptly about Harriet's manner, which was really appalling. Mrs. Thornton screamed

and threw up her hands when the suggestion was first put before her, but afterwards admitted privately to Imogen that she, too, had been considering it of late. The question was decided by Harriet herself, who confided timidly to Imogen that she would like to go away to school and learn to be like her. Suitable prospectuses were at once secured by Imogen, who did not reveal to the others Harriet's ambition to resemble her sister-in-law; but Mrs. Thornton said emphatically that she would send Harriet to no school that she had not seen. After a good deal of argument it was decided that Mrs. Thornton and Imogen should visit some of the principal schools together, while Harriet was left at Roebuck Hall with her brother. Brearley did not want Imogen to undertake the tiresome journeyings and interviews, but for Harriet's sake she insisted. The two women decided to send Harriet to Charford, by which Imogen was favourably impressed, and Mrs. Thornton struck with awe; they brought home postcards and descriptions which impressed Brearley and Harriet, too, and from then till January Harriet talked of nothing but her impending departure. Imogen took a great deal of trouble with the child's outfit, for she was especially anxious that Harriet should not feel inferior, in any avoidable way, to the other girls. Indeed, she quite wore herself out with sewing and advice, till shortly before Christmas Brearley put his foot down in an explosion of wrath and forbade her to do another stitch.

Luke and Mrs. Armitage were both invited to Roebuck Hall for Christmas, but to Brearley's relief they both declined. He thought Mrs. Armitage's remaining in the south rather strange in the circumstances, however, till Imogen told him that her mother was still ignorant of their hopes for the spring. Brearley shook his head thoughtfully over this, and told his wife that she took things much too hard; he also offered to write to Mrs. Armitage himself, and as

Imogen did not directly forbid it, did so, enclosing a substantial present for his mother-in-law.

It was while she was making out lists of Christmas presents to be bought that Imogen with a pang remembered Miss Hoad. She felt extremely remorseful and guilty about poor Miriam, to whom she had never written since her marriage. How could she have been so ungrateful as to let Miriam drop out of her remembrance—Miriam to whom she owed her present happiness? (Imogen was now able to admit that it was happiness, not ecstasy, not joy perhaps, but quiet and hopeful happiness.) She took up her pen at once and wrote a long friendly letter to Miss Hoad, next day in Hudley secured for her those volumes of Hardy upon which her curious philosophy mainly rested, and despatched letter and parcel by registered post. She did not, however, receive any acknowledgment of her gift, but had not time to consider the significance of this in the rush of Christmas and of Harriet's last few weeks at home. A reproachful letter came from Mrs. Armitage in reply to Brearley's, announcing her early arrival at Roebuck Hall; but Imogen wrote begging her mother to defer her visit till the end of January, when Harriet would be safely gone. Privately she made up her mind that between Harriet's departure and her mother's arrival she would find time to visit Miss Hoad.

Harriet's composure gave way when the great day at last arrived, and she wept bitterly; Brearley, too, was much upset, and almost shed tears on the Bradford station platform, whither they escorted Harriet, putting her in charge of another Charford girl whom Imogen had heard of. Brearley came home annoyed with himself, with Harriet, and even with Imogen, saying loudly that he didn't know what poor Harriet had done to be packed off in that way, he was sure. Imogen drooped under this, and Mrs. Thornton, who had come back with them to lunch, defended her. By evening

Brearley was full of remorse for his unkindness to his wife, and when she explained to him her wish to visit Miss Hoad, he said at once that she could go to Bradford with him in the car on Thursday. They could lunch together—it would be like old times—and then the man could take her wherever she wanted to go and wait for her; he himself would return by train. Brearley was usually not at all fond of his wife's taking excursions by herself to visit people whom he did not know, and Imogen rightly regarded this arrangement as a concession wrung from him by penitence, and accepted it without attempting to alter its details.

On Thursday afternoon, therefore, she descended from the car and knocked at Miriam's door. She thought it very improbable that Miss Hoad herself would be in, but she hoped to see Lois, enquire about Miriam's health and occupation, and perhaps make some arrangement for Miriam to visit her at Roebuck Hall. After a second's pause, however, the door of the house was flung open, and Miriam herself appeared on the threshold, with a look of cold hostility darkening her thin face. Either Imogen had lost the exact memory of her friend's face, or Miriam had changed; she looked thinner, less normal, more haggard than Imogen remembered her.

"It's I—Imogen," said the girl quietly, thinking that her friend had perhaps not recognised her.

Miss Hoad's look of hostility did not diminish.

"Yes—I saw your car draw up. Come in," she said shortly, turning away into the house.

Imogen followed, closing the door behind her, as Miriam made no attempt to do so herself. There was no one else in the room, which on this winter's afternoon looked depressingly dark and small. On the table were arranged neat heaps of papers and books, among them those Imogen had sent at Christmas.

"Ah, you got my letter?" she said.

"Yes, I got it," replied Miss Hoad, still with the same air of bitterness.

"What's the matter, Miriam?" asked Imogen gently, sitting down. "Aren't you glad to see me? I've wanted so much to see you again."

Miriam turned on her. "You haven't given much sign of it," she burst out with an air of passion which assorted ill with her thin tones. "It's getting on for a year since I saw you or heard from you."

"Oh no!" protested Imogen. "I sent you a card—an invitation—in July."

"Did you? I never had it," said Miriam wistfully. "I was away from home then. But what's one card?" she broke out again in anger. "After that night at the opera you scarcely came to Mr. Jagger's at all, and you never wrote to me. Your mother thought I wasn't fit for you to associate with, that's what it was."

"Miriam!" exclaimed Imogen, revolted. "What do you mean? Please don't say such disgusting things. I left Mr. Jagger's because I married—and it was you who told me I ought to marry, you know," she added with a smile.

Miss Hoad was not listening. "You heard I had consumption, and kept away from me because of that," she accused her breathlessly, fixing her deep eyes on the younger woman's face.

"Oh, Miriam!" exclaimed Imogen in distress. "Is it true? Are you really ill?"

Miriam sat down and clasped her thin hands on her knees. She nodded. "Didn't you know?" she demanded, pathetically anxious to be convinced that Imogen was guiltless of neglect.

"I never heard a word of it," cried Imogen with an emphasis the more determined because she had half known

without being told. "How did you expect me to know when you didn't tell me? What have you been doing all this time, then? Have you left Mr. Jagger's? Have you been away to the seaside to try to get better?"

Subdued by Imogen's vehemence, Miriam began mildly to tell her the history of the last few months. The cold she had caught that night at the opera had proved a very severe one; she had been obliged to stay at home several weeks, and then visited her aunt at the seaside, as before. It was during this period that the dreaded word for her illness had first come up, and Miriam, sick at heart at the thought of it and quite heartbroken by Imogen's defection, had brooded over the two things as she wandered about on her lonely walks, and ended by connecting them. Her absence had extended to the end of July, which explained, she said, why she had not received Imogen's communication, whatever it was.

"It was an invitation to my wedding," said Imogen, "and I don't think your absence explains your not getting it at all. It was properly addressed."

"Oh!" said Miriam in her slow thin voice, smiling. "I'm not accusing the postal authorities, you know. It would reach this house quite safely, no doubt, but Lois doesn't understand the value of letters and papers. She's never had much to do with them, you know. I should like to have seen your wedding, Imogen."

"Are you at Mr. Jagger's again now, then?" pursued Imogen, leaving the subject of the lost card, on which she felt some indignation.

Miss Hoad shook her head. She had completed her course there by September, and with Mr. Jagger's help had secured a post in the business world—a very good post, said Miss Hoad with some pride. But in November the cold winds and the driving rain had overborne her; she had been ill, recovered

a little, struggled back to the office, relapsed again, and so on, until finally the doctor said she was not to attempt to work, but was to go to some seaside sanatorium and stay there. He was getting papers about the sanatorium, but it was not probable that Miriam would go there.

"Why not?" demanded Imogen.

Miriam was silent, and averted her eyes. Presently she said, coughing a little: "Ivy has had to go out to work."

Imogen thought privately that work would do Ivy no harm, but she felt deeply for this crash of Miss Hoad's ambitions for her. For a second time the structure of Miriam's career, erected with so much toil, had been hurled to the ground, and Imogen felt that this time the destruction was final. It was so pathetic that tears came into her eyes, and to hide them from Miriam she turned to the papers on the table and demanded lightly: "And what's all this?"

Miss Hoad's eyes glowed, and, stretching out her hand for the nearest sheet, she began to explain eagerly that she was taking advantage of her enforced idleness to collect all the quotations bearing on her philosophy. In her eagerness she spoke rather too quickly, and was interrupted by a severe fit of coughing, and Imogen realised that her friend was distinctly frailer; her face and hands were painfully meagre, her eyes seemed to have sunk into her head, and her strong personality seemed, as it were, to glow through the thin envelope of her flesh. The invalid, for such she was, caught Imogen's glance upon her, and her face darkened resentfully. Imogen looked away and began to turn over the papers, on which were inscribed, under the headings of their author's names, passages of prose and poetry in Miriam's exquisitely neat hand. Imogen commented admiringly on this beautiful neatness and the amount of labour it required, and Miriam, pleased, went on to explain—though she still breathed un-

evenly after her round of coughing—that she meant to work the quotations up into an essay, which she should publish under the title "Lamarckism in Modern Literature." "The title was your brother's idea," you know, she said playfully, misinterpreting Imogen's start of dismay. Smiling fondly and turning over the sheets with a loving hand, she went on to indulge in fancies about the shape, size, colour, publisher, and print of her proposed volume. She showed Imogen a slim expensive volume whose format she approved.

"I should like mine to be like that," she said, fixing her deep eyes on Imogen's face in a look of joyous pride.

But, of course, "hers" would have more substance than the volume she held in her hand; hers, Imogen gathered, was to be a masterpiece, brief, restrained, but epoch-making. The girl saw that Miriam had decided that the disappointments and the brevity of her life were all worth while to produce a volume such as hers would be. The book was Miriam's third attempt to build up a career. Imogen remembered hearing Luke once comment pityingly on the ardent, eager schemes of consumptives who had but a few short years to live. She sighed.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?" demanded Miss Hoad in a defensive tone.

Imogen did not know what reply to make. She could not bear to say anything discouraging to poor Miriam, but on the other hand she thought it might be only cruel kindness to encourage her in false and impossible hopes; and judging from Miriam's letters and her speech and the narrow limits of her mind, her hopes seemed to Imogen to be indeed quite impossible of fulfilment.

"Of course it will take a long time to finish," threw out Miriam, watching her suspiciously.

"It will, indeed. Do you think it's wise to stay indoors so much and work so hard at it?" said Imogen, temporising and despising herself for doing so.

"I don't think the Bradford air is so life-giving as all that, my dear," suggested Miriam with mild sarcasm.

"Perhaps not. Where is that—other place—you spoke of going to?" enquired Imogen.

"The sanatorium? It's in Southport," said Miriam with a rather bitter smile. She rose, lighted the gas, and producing various descriptive booklets and official forms concerning the place, threw them down in front of Imogen with a defiant air. "I'll get some tea," she said. "That is, if you'd care to have tea here," she added haughtily.

Imogen thanked her as if she had expected this hospitality, and Miriam, somewhat mollified, proceeded to fill the kettle and make other simple preparations, moving slowly about the room with bowed shoulders.

"It seems quite a nice place, Miriam," said Imogen cheerfully, turning the booklet sideways to inspect the pictures.

Miriam again smiled her bitter and resentful smile. "Ivy's had two places in the last three months, and left both of them," she said.

The apparent irrelevance of this remark puzzled Imogen, and she pondered it thoughtfully.

"Do you mean you can't go to Southport because you can't afford it?" she cried, suddenly finding its clue. Miriam's deep flush answered her, and Imogen began at once: "But you *must* go! I'll——"

"Be careful what you say, Imogen Armitage!" cried Miriam, turning savagely on her like a wounded animal. "Don't offer me——" she was going to say "money," but could not bring herself to stoop to the word, and added instead proudly "anything."

"My name isn't Armitage now," Imogen reminded her

lightly, clutching at this feeble straw in the hope of diverting Miriam's attention.

Miss Hoad, who stood drawing uneven breaths and glaring fixedly down at her from eyes black and glittering with rage, demanded on a contemptuous note: "What is it, then?"

Imogen had given this information in her letter, but she repeated it, and reiterating "It was you who advised me to marry, Miriam," she told her the history of her marriage and the details of her present life.

"And are you happy?" demanded Miriam, apparently uncertain how to take these revelations.

"Oh yes," said Imogen smiling. "Your prescription was the right one, Miriam. I owe it all to you—and your philosophy," she added on an inspiration.

Miss Hoad's face softened; she smiled maternally, and her eyes resumed their former look of glowing kindness. Seating herself on the arm of Imogen's chair, she put an arm affectionately round the girl's shoulders, and drew her head down to her thin breast. She demanded further details of Imogen's life; the girl told her about Harriet, and thus drew the conversation round to Ivy. Miss Hoad explained, at first hesitatingly, later as though it were a relief to be able to confide in someone, the progress of Ivy's career. Ivy had gone out into the business world as a clerk. Ivy did not like business; she did not like being indoors all day, and she was contemptuous about the people with whom she had to work. She liked light and colour and life—and young men, explained Miss Hoad with a timid air of being out of her depth; and she was independent, and as soon as she got a place she began to be scornful about it and say she was sure she could get a better one, and this went on in a rapid crescendo until the day when she came in and announced blithely, throwing her hat on the table, that she was leaving her work next week.

The first time this happened she got another job almost immediately, which Miss Hoad thought materially good, but from the psychological point of view unfortunate, as it had encouraged Ivy in her restlessness. Now, however, she had been without work for three weeks, and had consequently become quite attached to the amenities of earning and anxious to get back to them. Miss Hoad thought she had had a lesson, and might do well in future, for the child was quick and lively and could work hard when she chose.

"I think she might do better in a bigger place where there were more people," she concluded. "Father got her the other two, and the offices were rather small and not very well equipped, you know, and Ivy's so particular."

She smiled sadly, and added with the understatement of reserve that, she herself being on the sick list, the matter was rather serious.

"Perhaps my husband could find a place for Ivy," suggested Imogen.

"Do you think he could?" cried Miriam, so eagerly that Imogen realised the situation was indeed serious.

"Of course I can't promise, but I'll ask him," said Imogen. "And," she added firmly, "you must really allow us to do something for you, too, Miriam. You must go to Southport."

Miriam jumped up and attended to the kettle, a look of extreme displeasure darkening her face. After a moment she asked Imogen, stiffly, not to re-open that subject; but Imogen was not to be put off in that way. She was deeply ashamed of herself for having neglected the older woman for these last months, and felt responsible for her welfare. The picture of Miriam wandering about alone at the seaside last summer, brooding about Imogen and longing for a letter from her which never came, smote her heart. She remembered, too, the previous January, when Miriam had dragged herself to Mr. Jagger's office daily in order to support the

girl through that terrible month of anniversaries, and it seemed to her that Miriam had restored her friend's health at the expense of her own. Imogen could be as obstinate as Luke when her mind was made up, and it was very firmly made up now—she was only too thankful that her present circumstances allowed her to be so pressing. Miriam, however, was haughtily obdurate, and as the discussion went on her refusals grew rude and wild.

"We can get along perfectly well without any outside interference," she declared proudly, her nostrils quivering, a dark flush on her thin face.

"'We'?" queried Imogen.

"Ivy and myself," explained Miriam, meeting the girl's reproachful glance with an angry flash of her dark eyes. "I should have been glad to hear of a place for Ivy, but now I don't wish you to interfere at all, in any way." She paused to cough, and then added haughtily in her thin reedy tones: "Do you usually insult your friends in this way?"

At this Imogen exclaimed, but she resumed her attack with more determination than ever; she felt that she must succeed in making Miriam see the matter reasonably, for if she did not she would leave her irretrievably alienated by her offer of help.

"And what about your book?" she urged, touching the papers, which Miriam had collected into a neat pile. "You'll need strength to finish it."

Her previous lack of candour about this work got its due reward, for Miriam, though she was obviously struck by the argument, threw out savagely: "What's the book to you? You don't care about it."

In desperation Imogen played a card she had hitherto been too proud to use; laying her hand on Miriam's she informed her of her personal condition.

"If you care for me at all you can't refuse me now, Miriam," she told her earnestly. "You'll spoil my happiness if you refuse." She added bluntly, abandoning reserve: "You'll make me ill."

"I don't see why my refusal should spoil your happiness," said Miriam obstinately, though her lips trembled. "You can go away and wait happily for your child without troubling about me. My affairs needn't trouble you."

"But I shan't have a moment's rest if you don't go away to Southport!" cried Imogen, beginning to feel the misery of defeat. "I shall worry myself to death about it." She was really tired and overwrought with the long strain of Harriet's preparations, and the pathos of Miriam's position, in contrast with her own bright hopes, was suddenly too much for her nerves; she covered her face with her hands and broke into hysterical sobs.

Instantly Miriam was beside her, soothing her with loving words and quiet caresses, her brown eyes beautiful again with devotion. Imogen clung to her and abandoned herself to a wild weeping which she found she could not control.

"Don't refuse my help, Miriam," she implored between her sobs. "I beg of you not to refuse it. Say you'll accept it, Miriam!"

Her manner was so wild and her distress so genuine that Miriam was seriously alarmed; terrified of the possible physical consequences of a refusal she said hastily: "Yes, yes! I'll accept it."

"And for Ivy, too?" murmured Imogen, still weeping with vehemence.

"Certainly, for Ivy too," agreed Miss Hoad.

Later that evening Imogen began to describe Miriam's situation to Brearley for the purpose of enlisting his help. It was a recital she would gladly have postponed till the

morrow, for she felt simply tired to death and quite unequal to the strain of any more emotion; but there had been something in Miriam's manner as they parted which forbade delay. The slightest delay on Imogen's part would be interpreted by Miss Hoad as reluctance to fulfil her promises, and Miriam's proud spirit would welcome the chance of scornfully withdrawing her own consent. Brearley just now naturally wished to be especially tender to his wife; he had had an extra glass or two of wine at dinner which he felt guilty about and anxious to atone for, and he was touched by Miriam's history, which indeed, needed no art to make it pathetic; he scrutinised the Southport booklets, which Imogen had brought away with her, in a business-like manner, and drawing out his cheque-book said he would turn a round sum over to her and she could send it in installments to Miriam as they were required—probably Miss Hoad would like that arrangement best. His wife agreed, and the cheque changed hands. Imogen then asked whether he could do anything for Ivy Hoad, explaining the circumstances and placing Ivy's character in the most favourable light.

"She's just a little older than Harriet," she said, to enlist his sympathy.

To her surprise Brearley scowled and seemed reluctant.

"I'm not very lucky when I recommend people for places, Imogen, and that's a fact," he said, playing rather irritably with his fountain-pen.

Imogen coloured; it was a reference to Johnnie Talland—the first she had ever heard from Brearley's lips. His silence on this point was often a source of wonder to her, for Brearley had been good to Johnnie, and it was one of her husband's harmless foibles not to be unduly silent about his own good deeds. That he was silent about this one out of consideration for her was a piece of unexpected delicacy which had touched her. She murmured now that he at least had done his best

and had nothing with which to reproach himself. Brearley, apparently mollified, sniffed thoughtfully, and then burst out, half serious, half in jest: "What do I owe Miss Hoad, anyway? All I know about her is that she used to spoil my Thursdays."

Imogen laughed, and said teasingly that it was a shame his Thursdays had been spoiled, that she was sorry he had been so ill-used, poor thing, and so on. This kind of affectionate little joke was a rarity from her, and Brearley sat looking at his wife in smiling admiration, enjoying it thoroughly. An idea struck Imogen, and she said on a more sober note: "I should never have married you if it hadn't been for Miss Hoad, you know."

"Why not?" demanded Brearley, startled and annoyed.

"Oh, it just was so," returned Imogen with that reserve of hers which her husband found so inscrutable. She added with a reassuring smile: "So you see you owe her the equivalent of me."

"Oh, do I?" said Brearley with a jocular sniff. "In that case, I suppose, I shall have to try and do a bit of something for her."

Next evening on his return from the mill he told his wife to send that Hoad child who wanted work to his Bradford office in Booth Street—he had arranged with his man there to take her on. Imogen, greatly pleased, sat down at once and wrote joyously to Miriam, and in a few days arrangements were completed. Ivy became an employee of Messrs. John Thornton, Miss Hoad went off to Southport, and Imogen felt with relief that she had now leisure and heart to devote herself to her own affairs.

The amenity of Mrs. Armitage's visit, however, was completely spoiled by Harriet's letters. A perfect shower of these homesick, tear-stained little scrawls suddenly began to descend on High Roebuck, imploring with increasing fer-

vour that the writer might be allowed to come home instantly. Imogen was much distressed, and wrote soothing letters to the child every other day. Brearley at first laughed, then he grew annoyed, then he began to grumble that he never *had* wanted the child to be packed off to school like that, and presently his exasperation against his wife and mother, who had urged the despatch of Harriet, reached such a pitch that there was quite a scene whenever one of Harriet's letters arrived, and Imogen positively dreaded the sight of her unformed childish writing. At last one morning when he opened Harriet's mid-week epistle he lost his temper completely, raged against the cruelty of boarding-schools, and swore roundly that he should go off to Charford that very day and bring Harriet back with him. Mrs. Armitage's amused smile did not tend to soothe his temper, and he glared so angrily at his wife that Imogen, who was feeling ill that morning, dared not oppose the restoration of Harriet; with visions of Brearley raging at Harriet's superiors, however, she mildly suggested that perhaps Mrs. Thornton could go instead.

"I shall go myself," shouted Brearley, "and see what kind of a place it is you've packed Harriet off to."

"Very well," said Imogen coldly. "Just as you please."

"*You* don't need me when you've got your mother here," continued the enraged Brearley loudly. "As a matter of fact I can't go to-day, because I've an important business appointment this afternoon, but I shall go by the first train to-morrow morning."

He looked about for the time-table, and not finding it in its accustomed place swore angrily, turned everything upside down, and rang a violent peal on the old-fashioned bell. When the time-table was at length brought he withdrew to the window and studied it in resentful silence, finally announcing that he should need breakfast at seven in the

morning. He then threw himself back into his chair at the table and complained that the bacon was cold. Mrs. Armitage continued to make an excellent meal, but Imogen could eat nothing; noticing his wife's white face and lack of appetite Brearley was seized with remorse, and when the meal was over he enticed her by a clumsy stratagem into another room away from Mrs. Armitage, kissed her tenderly, and said he hoped she didn't mind what he had said about boarding-schools.

"Of course not," said Imogen, forcing a smile.

But this was not true. Imogen superintended the arrangements for her husband's early meal next morning with her customary care, came down at seven to pour out his tea—he preferred coffee, but it made him bilious, and it was one of Imogen's minor duties to keep it from him—kissed him dutifully farewell in the hall, and told him not to hurry home again; but she felt disheartened and depressed, and not pleased with him. To begin with, she thought his errand foolish; then she could not help feeling that his present behaviour showed that he loved his sister better than his wife, and if it were so then there seemed to be no point left in any detail of her married life. Mrs. Armitage, noticing her depression, remarked comfortably that all men were alike in that they hadn't a grain of sense between them. She added a few observations on Harriet, and said that Imogen might as well give up bothering with her, for it was impossible to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. In conclusion she casually let drop that she had just written to Jennifer to arrange for the opening of Royd Bank early next week. Imogen defended Harriet, but did not oppose her mother's leaving Roebuck Hall sooner than she had originally intended; it was obvious that Mrs. Armitage and Brearley were friendlier when they were apart.

Mrs. Thornton, who called round in the course of the

morning on some small domestic matter, was extremely annoyed to find that Brearley had gone off on such a fool's errand, as she called it. She hinted that Imogen ought to have had more sense than to let him go; Harriet had written to her once like that, she said, but she had sent a discouraging reply, telling the child plainly that she was where she had to stop. Imogen winced at this brutality, and promptly veered round to poor Harriet's side; she now reproached herself for misjudging Brearley's impulse, which, after all, sprang from genuine kindliness and a sensitive appreciation of other people's suffering. She wrote him a little note to his Charford hotel, bidding him bring Harriet to Roebuck Hall for a few days until Mrs. Thornton should be reconciled to the idea of her return; she also had a room prepared for Harriet, and ordered the rich dishes which the child loved. A telegram on Saturday morning announced Brearley's return in the afternoon. Mrs. Armitage, with her customary tact, found that she wished to spend that part of the day at Royd Bank. Imogen put on a frock which Brearley liked, sent the car to the station, and working herself up into a suitable state of sympathy for the persecuted Harriet, prepared to be a perfect wife and an admirable sister-in-law.

At four o'clock she heard the car come up the drive, and went out into the hall to greet the travellers. Brearley entered the house alone.

"Where's Harriet?" cried Imogen, acutely disappointed. "Have you left her with your mother after all?"

"I've left her at Charford," exploded Brearley in a rage which he had obviously been nursing for a hundred and fifty miles.

"But why?" cried Imogen.

"Because she wouldn't come," shouted Brearley angrily. "She says she's all right now, quite happy, and wants to stay."

In spite of his obvious fury Imogen could not help laughing, and the more she thought about it the funnier the incident appeared; she sat down and went off into silvery peals.

"It's all very well," growled Brearley, smiling in spite of himself, but still hot and angry—"it's all very well for you to laugh, Imogen, but fancy her making a fool of me like that! Little vixen! I'll think twice before I try to help her again, I can tell you. Taking me away from you, and everything!"

"Well, I'm glad she's settled down so nicely," said Imogen in a soothing tone. "Come and have some tea. Why was she unhappy before? Did she tell you?"

"It seems she was put in a higher class," explained Brearley sulkily, allowing his wife to draw him away towards tea—"because of her age, you know—and she couldn't do the work, and it upset her. And now they've moved her down one, and she's all right—she chattered no end to me about all sorts of girls, and put on such airs! Stupid little thing! worrying me like that! It's a beautiful place, too, is Charford—beautiful; and very well run. She couldn't be in better hands."

"I'm glad you approve of it," said Imogen demurely.

Brearley coloured.

"I shall never take anyone's word against yours again, Imogen," he said with conviction. "I told Harriet so. Where's your mother?"

"She's out—at Royd Bank. I hope you weren't unkind to poor Harriet?" said Imogen, alarmed.

"I dare say I was a bit sharp with her," admitted Brearley. "But I felt as if I couldn't get over it. Nay! I never felt such a fool in my life, never."

"Well, never mind," said Imogen consolingly. "It's turned out well in the end, and perhaps it will be a lesson to

Harriet, poor child. Charford is a very great change for her after High Roebuck, you know."

But Brearley was not to be comforted. He would not leave the subject, but repeated the details of his visit over and over again, and to Imogen's surprise and distress he seemed to harbour a real resentment against his unlucky little sister. When Mrs. Armitage came in and enquired where Harriet was, Imogen remarked with a smile that Brearley had persuaded her to remain at Charford.

"Oh, come now, that's much better," drawled Mrs. Armitage, looking at her son-in-law with approval.

Imogen hoped that Brearley would adopt this version, which spared his pride; and in public he did so. Privately, however, he continued to harbour annoyance with Harriet; he would not write to her, giving his wife instead severe messages to send to her, which Imogen toned down *en route*. Imogen tried to tease him out of his resentment, but she was not successful; finally she told him plainly that Harriet's peculiarities were in large measure his fault for neglecting his sister's education as he had—he was her guardian, and the responsibility was his. This seemed to strike him forcibly, but not quite in the way his wife had wished. He muttered, "Well, it's all right, but I don't forgive people easily who try to make a fool of me"—a remark which Imogen suspected was meant to refer to Luke, who was now back at Royd Bank, as well as to Harriet—and took to writing very stern moral letters to his sister, quite as though she had committed some serious crime. When she came home for the Easter holidays, too, he often threw out critical and sarcastic remarks to her, and made public references to her early homesickness which caused poor Harriet, who was just acquiring public school ideas of reserve and correctness, to blush with shame. Even Brearley, however, admitted that she was much improved, and he was proud

of her, and still had a real feeling for her; but it was neither his old infatuated fondness, nor a wiser and more tolerant affection, and Imogen often winced at the harsh and exacting criticisms which poor Harriet had to bear from him.

BOOK IV

RICHARD

Imogen's child—a son—was born in May. His advent was much celebrated, and he was christened Richard Brearley amid general High Roebuck rejoicing, but he did not bring to Roebuck Hall the happiness which his parents had anticipated. Imogen nearly lost her life at his birth, and Brearley was beside himself with anxiety and alarm. Then the child's head was marked with the forceps, and he was painfully small and delicate, with thin, skinny little arms and legs, a meagre, sallow body, and that pathetic look of conscious resignation which so often accompanies infant weakness. He very rarely cried, and as he lay in the nurse's lap he moved his puny little limbs feebly about with an air of exhaustion; there were endless difficulties about his food, and in spite of all the care that was lavished on him he seemed at first never to thrive, but to remain weak and sickly. Imogen's brow became furrowed with anxious watchings over him, and she lost some of her fresh young beauty. From morning till night her mind was filled entirely with maternal cares, so entirely indeed that Brearley did not like it; he teased his wife about her preoccupation with Richard, accused her of caring more for the child than for him, and was hurt when she replied absently: "Well, he's your child as well, you know," instead of giving him the assurance he wanted. Brearley grew mildly sarcastic; when he announced any arrangement he concluded with an "if Richard will permit," and often observed, with an intention not altogether jocular,

that he liked to be master in his own house even if there was a baby in it.

The fact was that Brearley was deeply wounded in his pride and self-love by the child's delicacy. It was no use pretending that Richard was a normal child, for he was not; and though Brearley had moments of sentimental tenderness for the poor little ailing fellow, he did not really love him, and somehow could not feel that he was really his son. Mrs. Thornton was equally disappointed, and she quite turned against Imogen for producing such a child, the like of which, she said, had never been known in her family. She admitted grudgingly, when pressed, that Imogen was a splendid mother—better than she had expected—but it was no pleasure to her to see her grandson, and all her original dissatisfaction with the Armitages returned. Harriet, on the contrary, loved Richard sincerely, but her good will was as yet childish and uninformed, and her long absences at school made her feeling count for little in the Thornton total.

In contrast with the Thorntons, the Armitages came out extremely well in their new relation. Luke's grave sympathy and genuine interest were a real support to Imogen in her anxieties, and Luke seemed to regain some of his old tenderness for his sister—though from this Imogen guessed that he augured ill for his nephew. Mrs. Armitage revealed herself in a most unexpected light, for she was indefatigable in her zeal for Richard's welfare; she took endless trouble with his food, spent hours nursing him, watched in the night beside him when he was ill, gladly performed manual services for him, and was genuinely happy when he was found to have gained in weight. These manifestations on her part necessitated her frequent presence at Roebuck Hall. Brearley sniffed resignedly when she appeared, shrugged his shoulders, and for Imogen's sake said nothing; but his mother grumbled—she said that it was just what she had expected; the Armitages

were going to live on Brearley: they had sufficiently shown what kind of people they were over those wedding bills: Royd Bank would soon be given up altogether, and Brearley would have Luke on his hands as well as his mother-in-law, if he were not careful. The echo of these grumblings reached Imogen and made her angry; she set her mouth in a rather hard line, and continued to give herself the benefit of Mrs. Armitage's assistance, which compared so favourably, both in quantity and quality, with that of her accuser. Indeed, the attitude of both Mrs. Thornton and her son was that the less said about Richard the better, and they hoped for better luck next time.

One day Brearley not untenderly voiced this sentiment to Imogen.

It was a wet Saturday afternoon; he was just putting a document away in the library safe where he kept his papers, and he called his wife in to look at it. Imogen sighed as she saw that it was a copy of his will. Like many owners of great possessions, Brearley liked to toy with his will; he was always having wildly ingenious ideas about the disposition of his property, which it was the duty of his solicitor to curb. The Thornton family solicitor, who was well accustomed to the curbing process, had recently died and been replaced by his son, a man of rather less than Brearley's age, for whose ability Brearley had an immense admiration. Imogen's opinion of him was much less favourable. She knew nothing of the law, but she had an instinctive certainty that if there was a foolish course to be taken in any legal matter Brearley always wanted to take it; she thought young Mr. Hesketh did not curb him nearly enough, and she was always uncomfortable when any matter came up which required legal action. Brearley, highly amused at her dejected look, explained reassuringly what she knew already, that at the time of his marriage he had made a will settling

various sums on herself and her children. Imogen had heard this before, and was always astounded at the magnitude of the sums he seemed to think necessary for her maintenance; what she had not heard of was Mrs. Armitage's urgency about this point—Brearley had jibbed at settlements other than by will—and warned by previous experience Brearley did not mean to let his wife hear if he could help it. Now, however, that it seemed certain that Richard would never be able to fend for himself, some additional security for him had seemed necessary, so the provisions of the original will had been re-modelled, and a new document had received Brearley's signature that morning. Imogen was to be Richard's legal guardian till he came of age, and as a second trustee Brearley had appointed young Hesketh himself. Brearley hoped, with an air of virtue, that Imogen would approve of all these arrangements. Imogen thought them rather unnecessary at present, considering Richard's youthfulness, and she would have preferred Luke for Richard's guardian—from the medical point of view he would have been so admirable—but she was pleased by Brearley's forethought for his little son, and expressed this pleasure by remarking that he had been very generous to the child.

"Ha!" said Brearley at this, with a grimace, turning over the other papers in his safe. "I dare say he'll cost me a pretty penny in one way or another, will Richard, being like he is."

Imogen turned away, hurt. That her husband should regard her child as a burden—and he was constantly revealing that he did so—never failed to wound her deeply. She thought for a moment, and then said in rather a cold tone: "I don't see what you mean about Richard costing you a great deal. What difference will it make to you, leaving that money to Richard?"

"Oh, none to speak of," muttered Brearley, who was

already rather ashamed of himself for that last speech. "There'll be less for Harriet, that's all."

"For Harriet!" exclaimed Imogen in dismay. "What has she to do with it?"

Brearley sniffed, and seemed disinclined to answer.

"But you mustn't take anything for Richard out of what Harriet ought to have, Brearley," Imogen adjured him, much dismayed by the train of ideas which his words had started in her mind. "Harriet mustn't suffer because of Richard—or of me," she added, a painful thought striking her. "You won't let her, will you?" she begged, laying a hand on her husband's arm.

"But that's all silly nonsense, Imogen," cried Brearley, colouring. "Don't be so silly! Naturally when a man marries his first thought is for his wife and family. Don't you know that marriage invalidates any previous will? That just shows! If I hadn't married naturally the money would have gone to Harriet, but I have, and you come first—and Richard," he added, remembering his son just in time. Imogen gazed at him in wide-eyed distress; she began to understand why the families of such young men as Brearley were not eager for them to marry. "I don't intend to die just yet, anyway," concluded Brearley jocosely, "so you needn't look so worried about it."

"Brearley," said Imogen firmly, releasing his arm, "please tell me how much you'd left to Harriet before you were married."

"Confound it, Imogen!" cried the harassed Brearley, taking the document from her hand and throwing it back into the safe. "Will you leave Harriet alone? I'm her brother, not you. I wish I'd never shown you the will or told you anything about it. See here," he continued more affably—her disinterested pleading for Harriet was decidedly ornamental, and, as he had no intention of being influenced

by it, quite harmless—"you don't know anything about wills, Imogen, so don't pretend you do." His air of masculine superiority as he said this pleased him highly, and having shut the safe door and locked it, he kissed his wife with gusto.

"I understand enough to want Harriet to have her fair share," protested Imogen. At that moment she regretted her ignorance of these matters deeply, for she had received a strong impression that Harriet had been supplanted—perhaps inevitably, perhaps not; Brearley did not explain clearly enough for her to know which, and indeed she did not trust his judgment on the matter—by herself and Richard, especially by Richard.

"Leave Harriet alone, do," urged Brearley comfortably, patting her arm. "Of course, if Richard had been different, it would have been better; but he isn't, and it can't be helped, and what can't be cured must be endured."

"Poor Richard doesn't seem very welcome to anyone," murmured Imogen with quivering lips.

It was then that Brearley, putting his arm about her, bade her take comfort from the hope that they would have other and healthier children. For the first time since her marriage Imogen lost her temper and flew out at him. It was not that she objected to the idea of having another child, but Brearley's attitude to poor little Richard wounded her deeply—there was something coarse and callous about it which revolted her notions of human decency. She had suffered this for long in silence, and she now wept passionately, and told her husband that as he evidently cared so little for Richard, he could not care much for her.

"Haven't I just been doing my best for him?" protested Brearley, very much alarmed by this unusual storm.

"It's not money he wants, but love," sobbed Imogen hysterically.

"Well, well," said Brearley consolingly, patting her shoulder. "Of course I love him, Imogen—how can I help it when he's so like you?"

This was not true; the child had Imogen's dark hair, but his eyes, his features and expression were unmistakably those of the Thorntons; and poor Imogen felt that this crowning instance of his father's lack of perception was more than she could bear. She put aside his arm and fled from him in a passion of tears.

Brearley, thus lamenting, swore vigorously and indulged in a few angry reflections upon the nature of women. Here he had been, he reflected virtuously, to no end of unnecessary trouble altering his will—he thought it unnecessary because the child could not live more than a year or two at most in his opinion—simply with the idea of pleasing Imogen; and then she had gone off in a tantrum like that! Really, even the best of women passed understanding. These reflections and an excellent cigar somewhat soothed him, and he decided that it was no wonder that Imogen was hysterical after what she had gone through at Richard's birth, poor girl. When all was said and done, Imogen's devotion to her child was really admirable, and he decided that in future he must really try to be more enthusiastic about his son.

This resolution he kept when he remembered it; he asked regularly how Richard was, agreed willingly though with private irritation to the purchase of whatever appliance Imogen suggested for the child, and took trouble to give her the sympathy he thought she needed. Unfortunately, his efforts were perfectly obvious to his wife's discerning eye, and they saddened and irritated her; it was kind of him to wish to give her sympathy, certainly, but she knew that it was sympathy for her, not identity of feeling with her about their child, and Imogen felt the difference acutely.

The roseate hopes which she had begun to entertain of her married life faded; after all, she could not, she found, love Brearley; she could only continue to be a dutiful wife to him, and as time went on her thoughts turned rather often to the dead boy whom she had truly loved.

BOOK V

LUKE

I

Shortly after this Mrs. Armitage began to throw out strong hints to Imogen that she ought to induce Brearley to buy Luke a partnership in some flourishing practice; eventually, finding that her daughter did not respond, she spoke her meaning plainly. Imogen as plainly refused. Mrs. Armitage reproached her for her unsisterly attitude, but Imogen, looking steadily in her mother's eyes, told her that she herself, at the time of her daughter's marriage, had put it out of Imogen's power to ask anything of Brearley for the Armitages. Mrs. Armitage coloured slightly, arched her eyebrows, and enquired with some scorn if Imogen preferred her childish pride and silly scruples to her brother's future—she need be under no illusion, she said calmly, as to Luke's ability, which was steady but moderate.

"That's hardly a fair statement of the case," observed Imogen composedly.

"Why not?" drawled Mrs. Armitage.

"Because it leaves Brearley out," replied Imogen. "After all," she continued, with a touch of sarcasm, "his feelings ought to be considered, seeing that it's his money you want; and you know he doesn't like Luke. He has never forgiven Luke for that evening at Royd Bank before we were engaged, and I don't think he ever will. Luke has himself to thank if Brearley dislikes him."

Mrs. Armitage sighed, and said: "Yes, of course, that's so unfortunate. But Brearley will do anything for you, Imogen."

"That's just why I won't ask him!" cried Imogen. "It's taking such an unfair advantage. It's no use, Mother," she added more calmly, "I shall not ask Brearley to help Luke. If he chose to offer help, that would be a different matter, but I shall not ask him for it. Quite apart from anything else, I simply could not endure Mrs. Thornton's remarks if I did—she's bad enough about that sort of thing already. If Luke wants help, let him ask Brearley for it himself."

"He'll never do that," said Mrs. Armitage. "Of course he doesn't dream that I'm suggesting it to you."

"Well, I shall not ask Brearley," repeated Imogen firmly. "There is such a thing as loyalty to one's husband, and I'm not going to begin 'getting things out' of Brearley for the Armitage family. We've had enough already."

"Enough?" drawled Mrs. Armitage questioningly.

Imogen hesitated, and then told her mother about Brearley's provision for Richard.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Armitage, "all that is very satisfactory, of course, but Richard is Brearley's son. There is no generosity to you in Brearley's providing for Richard."

"I don't agree with you," said Imogen hotly. "And what about Harriet? At any rate," she said on a note of finality, "I shall not ask Brearley to help Luke."

"Well, there's plenty of time yet before Luke will be ready," said Mrs. Armitage with her deceptive air of languid resignation.

She did not fail, however, to make other attempts to persuade her daughter, as time went on and Luke became a fully fledged practitioner, but Imogen, though much troubled, was obdurate, and this disagreement was the jarring note in their harmonious coöperation over Richard.

Richard was slow in cutting his teeth, slow in gaining speech, and very slow in learning to walk, but at the end of

three years or so, thanks to Imogen's devoted care, he had managed to struggle into possession of these essential infant accomplishments; and though he would obviously never be a robust child, and was not very bright mentally, he seemed to have, as the nurse said, "turned the corner"; and there was no longer much doubt but that they would be able to rear him. The strain on Imogen's passionate devotion relaxed, and the demands on her time became less exacting; she was able, as it were, to raise her head and look about her.

Harriet, who was now eighteen and had just left school, seemed in need of her attention, and Imogen gave it gladly. Charford had been very successful with Harriet, and she was now a simple but very lovable young woman. She was not pretty, but there was something mild and sweet and fair about the whole of her serious young person, and her earnest goodness had a dignity of its own. She was very shy; indeed, her almost haughty reserve, so out of keeping with the rest of her gentle personality, sometimes made Imogen smile, while it perplexed and annoyed Brearley and Mrs. Thornton, who privately agreed that in that line Harriet was as bad as Imogen, without her common sense. Harriet took herself, her reading, and above all her musical ability, very seriously, sometimes even venturing to correct Imogen's taste on various points; and though Imogen was privately rather amused by her earnest musical aspirations, she encouraged the child, and told her to come and practise daily on the Roebuck Hall piano, which was much better than her own, if she wished. Harriet accepted with intense joy, and arrived every morning with a punctuality which struck Imogen as pathetic; she thought Harriet had rather a hard time of it with Mrs. Thornton, who was very proud of her daughter, but threw scorn on all those qualities in Harriet which made her something to be proud of. Brearley, too,

continued to be sarcastic to his sister. Even Brearley could hear that Imogen's music was better than Harriet's, and he seemed to find it necessary to let Harriet know that he thought so, frequently reminding her that Imogen had scarcely touched the piano since Richard's birth. Imogen protected Harriet as much as she could from Brearley's sarcasms and Mrs. Thornton's lack of comprehension; she also invited young people to the Hall as possible friends for her, and took her out to various social functions. Brearley never needed to be asked twice to go to anything lively of that kind, and the party was made symmetrical by the addition of Luke or some other young fellow—the quantity of young men whom Imogen knew was, Mrs. Thornton often suspiciously declared, simply prodigious. Brearley, too, was apt to be sulky if these young men talked brilliantly to his wife at supper, so Imogen relied increasingly upon Luke for these occasions. Luke was very kind to Harriet: he danced with her—Harriet was not a very good dancer, to the great disgust of her brother, who in a flamboyant style of his own danced rather well—and introduced her to his friends; he also lent her books, and took her to art galleries. Imogen was pleased by these amenities, and hoped they might reconcile her husband to her brother, but they did not have that happy result. Brearley seemed to feel that Luke's kindness had the hint of condescension which he always suspected in the Armitages; and though he and his brother-in-law often began the evening on cheerful terms—Brearley was always hilarious when he was going out—they usually ended on bad ones. This result was assisted by the fact that Luke nowadays was a teetotaller, while his brother-in-law liked large quantities of champagne. Moreover, though Brearley often grumbled because his sister was not more popular and dashing—poor Harriet was still rather timid in society—he was terribly jealous of her;

if she vanished from sight for an instant he grew fidgety and alarmed, and if she vanished in company with some young man he was quite likely to make the poor child a terrible scene about it on their way home, while Luke, whom they were about to drop at Royd Bank, sat glowering in his corner. At last Imogen told her husband frankly that if he wanted Harriet to make a marriage such as he would wish for her he must really cease these Turkish mannerisms.

"Harriet isn't the kind of girl who gets married," grumbled Brearley at this.

Imogen thought there was a good deal of truth in this remark, but she laughed, and told him lightly that all brothers thought that about their sisters.

"I reckon Luke didn't think that about you," objected Brearley in a tone which was only half humorous.

He continued to say sharp things to his sister, whom he had never forgiven since his fool's errand to Charford, and Imogen's tact was increasingly needed in Harriet's defence.

Another of the matters which Imogen found in need of her attention after her long seclusion in Richard's nursery was her correspondence with Miss Hoad. Miriam had spent the last two or three years fluctuating between Bradford and Southport, according to the condition of her health. When she was in Bradford she was silent, but when her cough drove her to Southport again she wrote stiff little letters to Imogen, thanking her for her kindness in enabling her to enjoy the sea air, and revealing in every line that the acceptance of that kindness was as bitter as gall to her. Imogen sighed when she received these letters, and replied to them with hurried but intimate little notes, mostly about Richard. She thought she saw, however, that Miriam did not realise Richard's extreme delicacy, but attributed Imogen's anxiety to the exaggerated fondness of a young mother for

her first child, or, what was worse, put the whole thing down as an excuse on Imogen's part for not visiting her. Imogen had long promised herself that as soon as ever she had time she would write Miriam a really full and convincing letter, which would restore her friend's sympathy; and one lovely Sunday afternoon in summer she sat down by the drawing-room window to carry out this plan. Harriet and Mrs. Thornton were expected for tea, but she had an hour to spare. Richard was asleep upstairs in the nursery; Brearley slumbered noisily in the library; Mrs. Armitage, who as usual was staying at Roebuck Hall, reposed comfortably in a basket-chair by the summer-house under the trees at the bottom of the garden.

Imogen began her letter rather coldly, partly under a sense of grievance, partly because she had really lacked practice in the art of late; but as she went on she dropped into the friendly, lively style which she inherited from that excellent correspondent Mrs. Armitage, and as she started a fresh page she smiled with pleasure at the certainty that this letter would indeed make everything well between herself and Miriam, and revive their ancient intimacy. In Imogen's view an intimacy which had dealt with a philosophy of the universe ought not to allow itself to come to grief over a few cheques, and she told Miriam so plainly. As she reached this stage Brearley unexpectedly wandered into the room, looking rather forlorn and in need of tea. He strolled up to the window where his wife was sitting, enquired with a yawn who she was writing to, and jocosely sent his love to her correspondent. He then descended into the garden through the open French windows, and looking back over his shoulder desired Imogen to come with him. Imogen shook her head with a smile, saying that she must finish her letter, so Brearley wandered off by himself with a disconsolate air—he was always rather disconsolate when

his wife's full attention was not fixed upon him—to look at the roses, and finally came to anchor beside Mrs. Armitage under the trees, where several chairs had been put out in readiness for tea. Imogen glanced out and sighed at this conjunction, for she feared that if the pair were left alone too long the subject of Luke might come up between them, and she knew in advance that there was nothing Brearley would dislike more than hints from Mrs. Armitage about Luke. She was still debating whether to go out to them or finish her letter when the question was settled for her by the arrival of Mrs. Thornton and Harriet, who exchanged signals with the pair under the trees and began to cross the grass towards them. A third figure, walking beside Harriet, proved to Imogen's astonishment to be Luke. Luke was not at all given to turning up at Roebuck Hall without a specific invitation, and Imogen had not asked him for that afternoon because she had not known that he was in Hudley—he had latterly been acting as locum-tenens in a country town in the East Riding. How he came to be arriving with the Thorntons she could not surmise, unless it was mere coincidence.

She hurriedly finished a sentence, threw down her pen and went out to her guests, who had already settled themselves in the basket-chairs, Mrs. Thornton panting a little as she threw back her feather boa, for the day was hot and she was growing stout. Half-way down the garden Imogen heard her name called, and looking back saw the nurse pursuing her, desirous of some instruction about Richard, who had now awakened and seemed fretful. Imogen paused and turned back with her, waving an explanatory hand to her ungreeted guests; even at that distance she could see how Mrs. Thornton's face clouded and Brearley's took on a sulky air, and the feeling of resentment which the Thorntons' attitude to Richard always aroused in her flooded her heart.

After she had seen the child, however, soothed him to sleep again, and decided a minor point in his diet, she resolutely put her grievance from her and rejoined the group under the elms with her usual serene smile. She perceived that she had not arrived a moment too soon, for the atmosphere was already tense with discord. Harriet held her head high, and her fair young face wore an expression of pride which was ill sustained by her quivering lips and wet eyes. Mrs. Thornton looked triumphant; Brearley, who was lounging untidily in his chair, wore an irritated flush; Luke's brow was like a thundercloud, while Mrs. Armitage's customary expression of tolerant amusement ineffectually concealed that she was feeling scornful.

Imogen paused, then, deciding that Harriet's distress was too obvious to be disregarded, asked the girl what was the matter. Harriet merely shook her head and murmured proudly "Nothing," but Mrs. Thornton explained that it was a scheme of Harriet's for travelling half across Europe to hear music which she could hear in Bradford any year.

Rather mystified, Imogen turned to Harriet enquiringly. In a choked voice the girl explained that she had merely suggested how nice it would be for Mrs. Thornton and herself to attend the Wagner Festival at Bayreuth next month. Before Imogen could say anything Brearley threw out sarcastically:

"I reckon it was Luke put that idea into your head."

"Very probably," said Luke in a tone of fury, looking steadily at his brother-in-law, who raised his eyes and affected an intense interest in the leaves above his head.

"I only said to mother that it would be nice if we could go," put in Harriet timidly.

"I think it would be splendid," said Imogen with her air of calm. "There's no harm in discussing it, at any rate."

"Well, *I* couldn't afford such a trip," said Mrs. Thornton —quite untruthfully, but in a tone which epitomised her view of her son's marriage and her own dowagership, "and so I've told Harriet. I tell her she must ask Brearley if she wants to go."

"I've enough to do without paying for such goings-on," said Brearley in his most disagreeable tone.

This phrase had a familiar ring to Imogen, and she wondered where she had heard it before as she contended "It wouldn't cost very much."

Mrs. Armitage threw her a reproachful glance meaning "You'll ask for anyone but your own brother," and Imogen replied with a proud look which said "Exactly."

"I don't think you have so many responsibilities as all that, Brearley," she pursued. Her tone was cold, for she was really annoyed with her husband. She did not blame him for refusing to pay for Harriet's jaunt, for there had lately been a strike in the textile trade, and for a month the chimneys of the Thornton mills had sent up no smoke into the summer air; but she thought he might have made his refusal more kindly. His rough usage of Harriet, combined with his indifference to Richard, began really to wear on her nerves.

"I've got Richard and you," retorted her husband sarcastically. "That's enough for any one man."

This unfortunate reference to Richard as a responsibility brought the blood racing to Imogen's cheeks; anger swept over her, and she gave her husband a look from her dark eyes which alarmed him.

"Now, Imogen!" he protested feebly.

"I don't see why you shouldn't let Harriet go to Bayreuth if she wishes," threw out Imogen hotly.

"I dare say you don't," shouted Brearley, abruptly losing his temper. "But I do."

"Then please tell me your reasons," demanded Imogen, equally angry. "I wait to be informed."

At this point Luke, who had had enough of this domestic scene, rose and strolled nonchalantly over to Harriet, to whom he suggested that she should show him the roses. The weeping Harriet silently complied, and the two went off together.

Brearley, who had really no reason whatever for his refusal except that he thought all Harriet's musical pretensions silly, affected, and like the Armitages, cast about rapidly for something convincing to say.

"You seem to forget we've had a strike this year, Imogen," he said in a tone of lofty grievance. "It takes me all my time to find the money for my weekly wages bill, let me tell you, never name pay for such goings-on."

This phrase too was familiar, and in an awful flash Imogen remembered where she had heard it before.

"Ah!" she cried, shrinking back and turning very pale. "Was it you? I thought—old Ullathorne—was it *you? Is that what you said to Johnnie Talland?"*

"Imogen!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, shocked, while Mrs. Armitage gazed at her daughter in alarm.

"Is it!" persisted Imogen wildly. "Is it? You did say it to him, didn't you?"

"Well, if I did," said Brearley sulkily, annoyed by this spoiling of a peaceful Sunday afternoon, "I don't see why you need make so much fuss about it. I don't see why I should be expected to pay for every young fool that wants to enjoy themselves."

Imogen sprang up and took a few rapid steps away from him.

"I say, Imogen!" called Brearley after her, sitting up.

His wife turned and faced him with blazing eyes.

"What do you want?" she demanded fiercely.

"If you're going in, tell the girl to put tea in the drawing-room," placidly commanded Brearley, who had a great objection to alfresco meals. "I don't like it out here."

Imogen gave an exclamation and fled from him into the house.

She did not pause till she had reached her own room, where, gasping inarticulate phrases of pain and despair, she locked the doors and gave herself over to the horror of her discovery. It was Brearley who had sent Johnnie to his death, and she, she, Imogen, the girl Johnnie had loved, had by some sardonic jest of Fate married Brearley and borne his child. Unable to bear this maddening conjunction of facts, which she repeated over and over again to herself with hysterical exactness, she flung herself down and beat frenziedly upon the bed with her clenched hands. Her husband's half admission of his refusal of Johnnie was quite enough to make her believe that it was so, for it all fitted into the facts so well, only too well. How well she remembered that it was she, not Johnnie, who had announced that he could not in honour borrow from Brearley a second time; how well—only too well—she remembered the tone of his voice as he replied crossly that he knew that as well as she did. Poor, poor Johnnie! Imogen looked back at Johnnie now with maturer eyes, and saw his character in the clear light of compassion. Johnnie was always too proud to admit his mistakes, too sensitive to bear the disapproval of those he loved, and so—poor Johnnie!—he concealed things. He had concealed from Imogen that he had already tried to borrow from Brearley and been refused. She remembered now that Mrs. Armitage and herself had seen him, the day before his death, dismounting from a High Roebuck tram. Yes, on his side it all fitted, and on Brearley's

side, as Imogen thought with passionate indignation, how it all fitted too! Brearley was meek enough to his wife because she had the stronger character of the two; but his roughness to Harriet, his callous disappointment about poor Richard—it was all part of the same thing; his harsh refusal of poor Johnnie was a perfectly characteristic proceeding on his part. There was no chivalry, thought Imogen, no consideration for those weaker than themselves, to be found in the Thorntons. Brearley had sent Johnnie to his death, and by some horrible, diabolic, skilfully planned jest of Fate, out of all the thousands of men in the world Imogen had married him. She sprang up and paced the room wildly, her hands pressed to her temples in an agony of fierce rebellion.

In one of her swift turns she came to the window and glanced out; the golden afternoon sunshine and the peaceful garden scene mocked her misery. Brearley, who had grown plumper in the last two years, was standing in the middle of the lawn looking very disconsolate, with his hands in his pockets and his mouth open. Hitherto when Imogen had seen her husband in some rather ridiculous and forlorn attitude she had felt for him an affectionate compassion; but now the sight of him thus shook her whole body with an intense hatred and scorn. She turned from the window and flew out of the room and along to the nursery, in an imperious gesture bade the surprised nurse leave her, and taking from a drawer Richard's small white coat, began to coax into its appropriate sleeve his thin little arm. It was thus that Mrs. Armitage, who after searching the downstairs rooms had come up to the nursery as the most likely refuge for her daughter, found her.

"What are you doing, Imogen?" she demanded, surprised—she had expected to find her daughter in tears.

"Putting on Richard's coat," replied Imogen without look-

ing at her. She completed this operation while her mother stood by in puzzled silence, and then observed in a low tone: "It's no wonder he's thin."

"What do you mean, Imogen?" queried Mrs. Armitage, much troubled by her daughter's wild air and strange speech.

Imogen turned on her, and in a wild flood of words told her that it was no wonder Richard was a thin, wretched, miserable, and abnormal child, for he was the fruit of an unnatural and abominable union. ("Absurd!" murmured Mrs. Armitage with a smile.) Brearley had driven Johnnie to his death, and she, the girl Johnnie loved, had married him and borne his child. Her voice rose wildly as she said this, and her mother began to be alarmed.

"Why should you put it all down to Brearley, you silly girl?" she began in a tone of remonstrance.

"Don't argue with me about it, Mother," Imogen commanded her. "I *know* it was Brearley's fault." She took a large white fleecy shawl which lay on an adjacent chair, and wrapped the sleeping Richard carefully up in it.

"What are you about, Imogen?" cried Mrs. Armitage in distress.

"I can't stay any longer in this house," explained Imogen with intense bitterness. She took Richard up in her arms and turned to the door. "I can't possibly stay with him any more."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Armitage. "Really, how absurd! What will you say next? Let me tell you, Imogen, you are very fortunate in your husband; Brearley would do anything for you."

"He wouldn't do anything for Johnnie," said Imogen with a hard look, breathing deeply. She continued her passage to the door, and Mrs. Armitage suddenly realised that her daughter was in earnest and the situation serious.

In a panic she seized her arm. "Now don't go and ruin your whole life for a foolish notion like this, Imogen," she urged. "All that about Johnnie is an old story now, and you can't do him any good by ruining yourself." Her daughter smiled coldly and shook off her detaining hand. "Where will you go?" continued Mrs. Armitage, trying to kill Imogen's notion by exposing it to the hard light of practical affairs. "There's nobody at Royd Bank to-day. What will you do with Richard? Do you suppose for a moment that the Thorntons will allow you to keep him if you leave Brearley?"

"Do you think the Thorntons are as fond of Richard as all that?" demanded Imogen hotly. "They're not—I can assure you they're not." It struck her with a sharp pang how different Johnnie's behaviour to a delicate child would have been from the Thorntons', and she repeated on a note of finality: "I shall not stay here." She pushed past her mother and left the room.

Mrs. Armitage, wringing her hands and exclaiming distressfully, followed her.

"I shall not let you go, Imogen!" she said, speaking in a low tone for the sake of any chance hearers, but with great determination. "Think of the scandal!" Imogen laughed, and her mother lost her temper. "You needn't imagine yourself living at Royd Bank," she said, "because I shan't receive you."

"Oh yes, you will," said Imogen, not believing her, and walking rapidly on.

"I shall not!" said Mrs. Armitage firmly, determined not to yield to a caprice which would mean the ruin of all her careful plans for Imogen. "Your proper place is here, with your husband and child, and I shall not help you to do anything so selfish and undutiful as to leave it."

Imogen, who was hardly in sufficient possession of her

faculties to realise what her mother was saying, merely gathering that Mrs. Armitage was trying to prevent her flight from the Thorntons, gave a little gasp of distress but went swiftly on, for she felt as though she should choke if she remained a second longer under the same roof as Brearley. At the foot of the stairs she encountered Luke, who had entered the house through the drawing-room window to deposit Harriet's hat, which he was just about to lay down on a table in the hall.

"Luke!" cried Imogen, clutching her brother's arm in agonised appeal. "Help me!"

"What's the matter? Come in here," commanded Luke purposefully, throwing down the hat and drawing his sister into the room he had just left. "What is wrong? What have you noticed? Put the child down here and let me examine him."

Imogen, bewildered, mechanically obeyed, and laying her little son on a couch, sank down beside him and gazed imploringly at her brother.

"You don't understand, Luke—it isn't Richard, it's Imogen," explained Mrs. Armitage rather breathlessly, following them into the room and closing the door behind her. "It's Imogen —she wants to leave the house this instant and never come back."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Luke emphatically.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mrs. Armitage, startled.

"I always knew it would come to this," enlarged Luke, in tones of keen distress. "I knew she would never be able to stand it." He stared heavily down at his sister, and was silent, apparently much perplexed.

"Your estimate of Imogen differed greatly from mine, then," said Mrs. Armitage grandly, seating herself within reach of Richard and loosening his shawl. The child half opened his blue eyes, but shut them again drowsily. "I

never imagined," continued Mrs. Armitage with great dignity, "that a daughter of mine would have the idea of leaving her husband."

"Don't you be angry with me too, Luke," Imogen implored her brother piteously. "I can't help it; I simply must go away."

"I don't blame anyone for wanting to leave Thornton," Luke, thus appealed to, said with conviction. "What I wonder is that you've been able to stand it so long. Look how he bullies Harriet! It's simply intolerable." He paused, then, disregarding his mother's angry exclamation of disapproval, continued to his sister: "Have you felt like this for long?" Imogen shook her head. "Then what has made you feel you can't stand it any longer?" he enquired, adding on a sympathetic note: "That row this afternoon?"

"Yes, yes—I've found out that it was he who refused——" began Imogen, and then stopped, reflecting that Luke also, though from very different motives, had refused poor Johnnie help. "It was he," she resumed, "who——"

"It's some nonsense about Johnnie Talland," interrupted Mrs. Armitage in an angry undertone.

"Ah!" cried Luke at this, all the accumulated bitterness he had felt about Imogen's unfaithfulness to Johnnie rushing irrepressibly to his lips. "It's a pity you didn't think about Johnnie before you married, my dear! It's too late now."

Imogen, struck to the heart, gave a shuddering cry and buried her face in her hands.

"However," continued Luke, with an air of being determined to give Imogen's plea the most scrupulously fair and just consideration, however painful that process might be, "if you really feel you can't endure Thornton any longer, of course you must leave him."

"Luke!" exclaimed Mrs. Armitage, infuriated. "Don't be so utterly absurd and childish. Life isn't as simple as all that. Do you want to ruin your sister? How can you bear

to throw away your own hopes like that, you foolish boy?"

At this Imogen raised her head. "I don't see what hopes Luke can have that could affect my remaining with Brearley," she said haughtily, thinking that if her mother referred to her own hints about a practice for Luke it was really intolerably base.

"Don't bring that in, please, Mother," urged Luke quietly, turning to her. "It's nothing to do with Imogen; her case must be judged on its own merits. Besides, nothing is settled yet, and perhaps it may be all a mistake."

In spite of his attempt to control it, his voice held such obvious distress and pain that Imogen was mystified, and looked up at him enquiringly; to her astonishment there were positively tears in his eyes.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "I want to go *now*. If you think it's right for me to go, Luke, why shouldn't I go now? I don't want to stay here another minute." She jumped up, and gathered Richard hastily into her arms again. "I want to go *now*," she repeated, her voice rising hysterically.

Mrs. Armitage started up in alarm, and Luke put a detaining hand on his sister's shoulder.

"No!" he said firmly. "I shan't allow you to do that, Imogen. It's a fatal mistake to take a serious step in a hurry."

"I'm glad you admit it is serious," threw in Mrs. Armitage sarcastically.

"You married Thornton in a hurry," continued Luke, disregarding his mother as before. "And look what's come of it. I blame myself very much for settling my own attitude to that without proper consideration, and I'm not going to have that mistake repeated now. You must take several days for serious consideration before you decide. When you have decided," he continued, again with his air of de-

termining that justice should be done though the heavens fell, and obviously making a great effort to speak with sincerity. "if you really feel that you can't endure life with Thornton any longer, of course I'll back you up in leaving him."

"Luke!" exclaimed Mrs. Armitage in supreme disgust. "Your folly passes belief."

"Meanwhile," concluded Luke in his laboured judicial phrases, "we won't mention the matter to anyone. There's no need to upset everybody and make Harriet miserable for nothing."

His mother gave a sigh of relief. "There I agree," she said. "And I'm sure if Imogen will only take time to consider, she will see how utterly impossible it is that she should leave her own child."

"But of course I shall take Richard with me," protested Imogen, beginning to feel the anguish of defeat.

"Thornton would have something to say about that," Luke told her grimly. "You'll have to consider all that, you know, Imogen. There are many points that can't be decided on impulse. As mother says, life isn't as simple as that."

Imogen felt that her cause was lost. At the thought of being obliged to remain even half an hour longer in this now hateful house she trembled with helpless misery, her head sank on her breast, and great tears rolled slowly down her cheeks and splashed on Richard's shawl.

"Promise me that if I tell you later I must go, you'll help me," she entreated her brother in a low quivering tone of intense wretchedness.

"I give you my word of honour that I will," said Luke emphatically, turning extremely pale. "But I hope," he added, "that you'll consider it very carefully." His voice broke as he said this; he turned away abruptly and walked towards the window, where he stood gazing out, obviously under

the influence of some strong though repressed emotion.

"You know all this is really very absurd, Imogen," said Mrs. Armitage soothingly, crossing to her daughter and caressing her bowed head. "You must put all that about Johnnie in the past where it belongs. Brearley is an excellent husband to you."

"Don't! don't!" cried Imogen, starting wildly from her mother's hand. A few paces away she stopped, drew herself up, and said in a kind of despairing resignation, "Take Richard." Mrs. Armitage obeyed, and Imogen continued with trembling lips: "I have a headache and shall lie down for a while. I shan't come down to tea. Please excuse me to Mrs. Thornton."

Mrs. Armitage sighed and said, "Very well."

Imogen again sought the refuge of her own room and gave way to a passion of tears. When she had spent herself in weeping she sat up, put her hands to her throbbing temples, and began, as Luke and Mrs. Armitage had so earnestly desired her, to consider. Her longing never to see a Thornton again increased with every minute she spent in the house; as she looked out at the little party—who, in default of her instructions to the contrary, were having tea in the garden—she realised, with a deathly sickness at her heart, how much she disliked Mrs. Thornton and had always disliked her; how greatly she had had to force her nature, these last three years, to be a dutiful wife to such a clumsy, stupid, coarse, and altogether alien personality as Brearley now seemed to her always to have been. She longed, with an intense burning longing, for her old, clean, quiet life at Royd Bank—so simple, so peaceful, among people she loved and understood. She would never understand the Thorntons. Whether, now that her first wild impulse had died down, she would have the courage to go through the sickening scenes which would be necessary to free herself from Brearley

and return to Royd Bank was another matter; perhaps with Luke's aid she would find the strength to achieve it. But there were points about Luke's attitude to her flight which she did not understand. She could have understood a wholehearted sympathy or a firm opposition, but Luke seemed to be sympathising with her with the approval of his reason but against his wish. Putting together various trifles she had noticed before, and the turn of one or two of his phrases that afternoon, she began to have a suspicion of what lay behind her brother's odd behaviour, and it added to her load of misery. She must see Luke again and have it out with him before she made that decision of hers.

Presently the group beneath the elms rose and separated; the sunny afternoon had mellowed into a golden evening, and the bells of the High Roebuck church began to ring for evensong. Someone approached Imogen's door, and the handle was turned and shaken. Imogen had recognised her husband's step, and she remained silent and motionless while Brearley went round through his dressing-room and tried the communicating door. Finding that this too was locked, he called plaintively: "I say, Imogen!"

Imogen sighed and sat up, pushing her hair back from her forehead.

"What is it?" she demanded wearily.

"When are you coming down?" demanded Brearley in an aggrieved but affectionate tone.

"Probably for supper," replied Imogen. "You'd better go to church with your mother." She added, "Take Harriet with you," thinking that with all three Thorntons out of the house she would have a chance of interviewing Luke.

Brearley grumbled mildly, for though he was and had been for many years churchwarden he rather shied at evening service, which made him feel too harrowed and sentimental

for his comfort. However, he agreed, as he eventually agreed to all his wife's propositions, and went off to marshal his church-going trio. Imogen dragged herself to the window to see them safely off the premises; Brearley went first with his mother, and Harriet followed behind with Luke. At the sight of her brother Imogen started slightly, and took the trouble to watch the party vanish out of the gate and reappear lower down the hill at the entrance to the churchyard. They were still four in number when they passed the church portals, and Imogen turned away, sick at heart. The sight of Luke, who was a confirmed agnostic, going to church for the sake of being with Harriet was as convincing to her as a statement from her brother's own lips; and she perceived that she was chained to Roebuck Hall by the fact that Luke and Harriet had fallen in love with each other, and that in their interest a breach between the Armitages and Thorntons was unthinkable. Imogen was fond of Harriet, and had her interests really at heart, but at that moment she could not help wishing that she had left her as she found her, in all her untutored *naïveté,* for thus she would have made no appeal to Luke.

Imogen lay for a long time silent and motionless, her face buried in her pillows, seeking wildly for some loophole in her situation which would warrant her leaving Roebuck Hall now, in the absence of the Thorntons. But she could find no such loophole. Richard—fancy her leaving Richard to the Thorntons' care!—Luke with his stubborn sense of justice, too honourable to claim his own happiness at the expense of his sister's; poor gentle Harriet, who would probably remain a spinster all her life if Imogen's quarrel with Brearley took Luke from her; the worldly Mrs. Armitage; the fact that Johnnie was irretrievably gone: everything and everybody was against her. She must resign herself to her fate.

Psalms and hymns floated up to her through the pleasant summer air as she went through this bitter and painful process. At last, when a longer pause than usual in these harmonies told her that the sermon had begun, she rose, changed her dress, re-arranged her hair, looked in at Richard, by whose side Mrs. Armitage was comfortably sitting, and went downstairs, her face cold and expressionless, intending to receive her husband and his guests on their return. When, however, she caught sight of her unfinished letter to Miss Hoad on the drawing-room window-seat, she found that she had overrated her fortitude. She tore the letter viciously into shreds and threw them into the fire, then ran upstairs to her room again. It was not, she reflected as she rapidly flung off her clothes, poor Miriam's fault that her prescription had worked out so ill, but all the same Imogen wished that she had never seen her.

Presently Mrs. Armitage tapped at the door, elicited the information that her daughter had gone to bed, and suggested a supper tray, which Imogen refused, and some tea, which she accepted, for her head ached. Supper was long over, and the Thorntons and Luke had departed, before the tea arrived, borne by Mrs. Armitage herself, who thus gained admittance to her daughter's room. Imogen had hardly had time to say to her, "Tell Luke I will stay at Roebuck Hall," when Brearley arrived, obviously in collusion with his mother-in-law—a piece of strategy on Mrs. Armitage's part for which Imogen felt no amount of devotion to Richard could atone. In spite of her efforts to detain her mother, Mrs. Armitage soon gave her artificial smile and departed, leaving the husband and wife alone together. Brearley perched himself on the bed, swung one foot, admired his wife's beauty, and became very affectionate and hilarious; he said Harriet could go to Timbuctoo if she liked for all he cared, and he would give her the outing as a birthday

present if Imogen wished. Rather disappointed by his wife's response to this surrender, which lacked effusiveness, he got up and wandered about the room, whistling inaccurately the first few bars of a hymn tune over and over again till his wife felt she should scream if he did not either desist or pass on to the next line. Eventually his wanderings brought him to the dressing-table, and he laid a clumsy hand on one of Imogen's silver trinket-boxes.

"Don't do that, Brearley!" exclaimed his wife, so sharply that the astounded Brearley—she had never spoken to him in that tone before—dropped it; the lid came off, and rolled, in company with various metallic odds and ends, ringingly about the room. Imogen gave an exasperated sigh and put her hand to her head. Brearley sniffed, muttered rather sulkily that he was sorry, and stooped about the room retrieving trinkets; when he had jarred a chair or two and knocked his head his wife besought him wearily not to trouble. He gladly obeyed, and, coming across the darkening room, planted his open palms on the bed and bent over his wife with a considering air.

"You're turning into a perfect bundle of nerves lately, Imogen," he told her in affectionate reproof. "I don't know what's the matter with you, I'm sure. Shall we go away for a bit, eh?"

Imogen looked up at him and hated him with all her heart. She hated his fond blue eyes, his light waving hair, his slack jovial face, his plump hands, his sniff, his Yorkshire accent, the way he mispronounced her name, above all the fact that he was alive and warm and Richard's father while Johnnie lay mouldering in his grave. Her husband's facile yielding, simply because she had made him a scene on the subject, to a pleasure scheme involving a sum of money five or six times the size of that he had refused to poor Johnnie, seemed to her particularly odious. An idea

flashed across her mind. She raised herself on one arm—the soft white curve of which Brearley did not fail to admire—and in bitterness of heart, such as she had never before felt towards anybody, began:

"I'm so worried, Brearley, about Luke's career."

II

This was the opening move of a long campaign on Imogen's part to make her husband do something for Luke.

The campaign proved long—it spoiled their summer holiday and lasted well on into the autumn—because to Imogen's surprise Brearley put up a stubborn resistance. To begin with, Brearley disliked his brother-in-law really heartily; he had never forgiven him for his odious behaviour that far-off night when he first visited Royd Bank, and nowadays he classed him with Mrs. Armitage as supercilious, condescending, interfering, and generally tiresome. Brearley was also extremely disappointed, quite nonplussed in fact, to find Imogen doing the very thing which for years he had stoutly maintained to his mother that she never had done and never would do. When Mrs. Thornton grumbled about Mrs. Armitage's mercenary calculations he had always been able to say that Imogen was different, Imogen had never asked him for a penny either for herself or her family, but on the contrary had frequently bothered him about Harriet's "fair share," as she called it. Now he felt that if he yielded and did something for Luke, his mother, who would inevitably hear of it, would triumph over him daily about it for the rest of his life—he would never hear the last of Imogen's perfidy, never. Imogen had over Brearley the ascendancy of a strong and determined nature over a weak and vague one, and he really dared not tell her what he felt about this in plain words, even if he could have found the appropriate words to do it in, but he tried to hint to her that her insistence about Luke was a real disappointment to

him. Though his skill in hints was not great, Imogen understood him perfectly; but she did not relent, for she regarded his helping Luke as an expiation on his part of his cruelty to Johnnie, and this expiation she was determined to exact. She grew to feel that when she had exacted it Johnnie's memory would be appeased, and she might be able to forgive Brearley and resume life on happier terms again, but that until she had exacted it there could be no peace for Johnnie, for herself, or for her husband. She grew quite morbid and feverish over the affair, and pursued Brearley relentlessly, with pale cheeks and eyes that glittered; the idea became an obsession to her, and the subject was always in the air when they were together. Mrs. Armitage was not with them just then—she had left them when they went away for their holiday, and had not been invited to return—and consequently she heard nothing of all this; but everyone in Roebuck Hall knew of their dissension and its cause. The disappointed Brearley saw that hints were of no avail; he was much irritated and harassed by Imogen's persistence, and his respectful, almost adoring love for his wife, which had suffered from Richard's abnormality, now sustained a further and more severe blow. He hardened his heart and became more obstinate than ever, with the rather futile obstinacy of the weak; he never, that is, gave Imogen a downright straightforward refusal or rebuked her for her persistence in a subject so unpleasing to him, for he dreaded an open clash of wills; but he constantly evaded her request by clumsy jokes and heavy sarcasms, and tried to pacify her by being very amenable in other ways. She was not pacified, for his evasions, which she thought cowardly, wore on her nerves; but her husband continued them with a persistence equal to her own, hoping that she would tire before he did.

At last, however, one cold October evening when they

were sitting together after his return from the mill and Imogen, as usual, was skirmishing lightly round the subject of Luke's career, the harassed Brearley's patience suddenly gave way, and he cried in a tone of intense exasperation, "Well, don't nag at me so, Imogen!"

"Nag!" cried Imogen, repeating the vulgar word indignantly.

"Well, you do nag," affirmed Brearley in a milder tone, rather alarmed now that he had at last formulated this accusation, though he had been longing to make it for weeks. In his agitation he rose, and leaned against the mantelpiece with his hands in his pockets and his back to the hearth—a posture which his wife did not admire. "You're always at me about Luke and his practice," he continued, looking down at his feet, which he had planted wide apart. "For heaven's sake leave him alone for a bit. What with the strike at the mill and this going on at home I haven't had a minute's peace this year."

Imogen would have been more impressed by this plea if she had formed a higher estimate of the value of Brearley's services to Thornton Mills. As it was she merely felt glad that she had at last forced her husband into open discussion of her cherished project, and she told him with an air of frankness that for her part she could have no peace until Luke's future was settled—his present mode of life was all very well for a time, but as a permanent thing would be most unsatisfactory.

"You care more about Luke than about me, then, seemingly?" demanded Brearley in an ominous tone at this, jingling the keys in his pockets.

Imogen hesitated, while the colour rushed to her husband's face and his mouth worked convulsively.

"I don't know that I care for anyone much nowadays," she said at last wearily.

"Oh, indeed?" said Brearley in a curious tone. "And since when has that idea come into your head, pray?"

"Except Richard," added Imogen, desiring to be strictly truthful.

The tears started to Brearley's eyes—the facility with which he wept always jarred on Imogen—and he flung himself away towards the window, muttering. After a minute he returned to the fireside and kissed his wife two or three times; he was obviously much moved.

"See here, Imogen," he said, clumsily patting her shoulder and stooping over her so that she felt his hot breath on her cheek. "You want me to help Luke. I don't want to help Luke. Those things cancel each other out, see? Can you tell me another good reason why I should help him? Eh? Can you? I'm willing to listen if you can. Luke isn't that Miss Hoad, you know," he added meaningly; "far from it."

Imogen never liked her husband less than when he was emotional, and that he should grow emotional over Richard seemed to her, considering his real view of the child, a piece of odious falsity. She moved her shoulder impatiently under his hand, and said slowly in a sombre tone: "Let this loan to Luke be an atonement for all your previous sins against charity."

Brearley stepped back with an angry look on his round pleasant face.

"I suppose you think there's a lot of them, eh?" he said. "Do you?"

"A lot of what?" said Imogen with impatience. "I don't understand what you mean."

"A lot of sins," cried Brearley, exasperated. "I know I don't talk as well as your Luke."

"Oh no, not a lot," said Imogen coldly, answering his

previous question now that she understood it. "One such sin is quite enough."

Brearley considered her frowningly.

"You're damned hard, Imogen," he burst out suddenly with vehemence, "sitting there like a block of marble, telling me you don't love me and throwing all my past mistakes in my face."

Imogen opened her lips to defend herself.

"Don't tell me you didn't say you didn't love me," cried Brearley, drowning her words. "I know you didn't say so, but it's sufficiently obvious—it's sufficiently obvious," he repeated, apparently pleased with the phrase, which, indeed, was much above his usual conversational level. He paused, perhaps hoping for an affectionate contradiction from his wife. Imogen, however, could not bring herself to give it him.

"You can't expect me to love you if you don't do what I want," she evaded with a cold smile which stirred her husband to fury.

"By God! I won't leave you that excuse, Imogen—you can tell your confounded brother I'll do anything he wants," he shouted thickly in her ear, his face red with anger, his usually mild blue eyes blazing. "I'll buy him three practices if he wants! *I* don't care how much it costs, but for God's sake let me have some peace in my own house again."

"Very well," said Imogen coldly, angered by his contemptuous allusion to Luke and by the intense vulgarity of the whole scene—it was one of her private complaints against her husband that he could never discuss anything without losing his temper. "That's settled then. If you want peace why make such a noise? You'll wake Richard if you're not careful. There's the gong. You'll feel better after dinner."

"Dinner, good heavens! I don't want any dinner," shouted

the infuriated Brearley. "Don't be so confoundedly superior, Imogen; you're enough to drive a man mad with your patronising airs. I hope to God Richard doesn't grow up like you, or I shall be glad he isn't fit for the mill, I can tell you."

He stuttered a few more angry sentences, almost inarticulate with rage, then flung himself violently from the room and slammed the door behind him.

After a few minutes Imogen went into the dining-room and waited for her husband to appear. As he remained invisible she sent a message to him by a maid, who returned with the information that Mr. Thornton had a headache and was not coming in. Imogen received this with a proper appearance of concern, and began to eat in solitary state. But as the meal went on the food began to choke her; her anger died down, she was able to appreciate the generosity and the pathos of Brearley's surrender, and in a sudden revulsion of feeling she became deeply ashamed of her own insistence on Luke's behalf. How could she have brought herself to behave so! The affair suddenly appeared to her in its true light, as having nothing to do with Johnnie at all and being the very reverse of what Luke would wish. She saw her acts as others would see them, and asked herself in horror whether it was really she, Imogen Armitage, who had vulgarly nagged at her husband in order to get money out of him. How she must have changed from the Imogen of the old Royd Bank days, the Imogen whom Johnnie had loved! Her cheeks burned, and leaving her meal unfinished, she sprang up from the table and left the room. A letter, whose exquisitely neat inscription showed that it proceeded from Miriam Hoad, had come by the late post and lay on the hall table. Imogen opened it and idly turned its neatly written leaves. These, to her surprise, were fairly numerous. Poor Miriam had again been driven to Southport by the approach of autumn, and she began by

thanking Imogen, in the proudest, stiffest terms, for the means of going there. The length of her letter was due to a burst of enthusiasm about her great philosophical work, which had, as she explained at considerable length, progressed but slowly of late under the caprices of her health. Now, however, she hoped great, nay immense, things from it, for she had discovered Miss Susan Glaspell, whose play, *The Verge,* would form a very substantial addition to the material of her essay. Descending from these abstractions, she enquired rather vaguely after Richard, and hoped that Imogen was happy—from her brief notes lately she had rather doubted it. Imogen recalled, with a sad little smile, Miriam's system of philosophy, which had lately become rather dim to her; it involved courage, she remembered, and high acceptance of an adverse fate, and there was something rather crude in it about creating God by one's own actions. The smile faded abruptly from her face as she remembered that these were the high and generous motives which had led her to marry Brearley. The present situation between herself and her husband presented itself to her with striking force as from Miriam's point of view a despicable failure; she coloured painfully, turned, and went impetuously off in search of Brearley with remorse and reconciliation in her heart.

She found him sitting in the dark in the library, obviously hurt and angered beyond bearing. Imogen turned on a rose-shaded lamp, looked at him, and hesitated. He was lounging in an ungainly attitude in the depths of an arm-chair, with one arm thrown over the back; on a small table beside him stood a liqueur decanter and a half-filled glass. If he had been a stronger and finer man, if he had been more addicted to intellectual pursuits and less to the pleasures of the table; if he had shown in the past tenderness to Richard and consideration for Harriet; if, even, his present at-

titude had held more comeliness and dignity, Imogen might have knelt beside him and told him all that was in her heart. But as it was she could not bring herself to humble herself thus far to the Thornton in him; instead she asked him in a kindly tone whether he really did not want any dinner.

"No," returned Brearley shortly. He had not moved on his wife's entrance save to tilt his head back, the better to fix on her a hard, critical, and rather insolent stare.

Imogen thought of Miriam, and making a great effort over her pride, said quietly, "Brearley, I'm sorry I've annoyed you so much lately."

"It's all right saying that when you've got your own way," threw out her husband sulkily.

Imogen hesitated. "I really am sorry," she repeated.

"All right, I believe you," said Brearley curtly, without moving. "You needn't say it again; it isn't interesting."

Thus adjured, Imogen could not think what to say next; and she stood silently before him, while Brearley's eyes wandered over her lovely face and graceful figure—he was usually intensely susceptible to his wife's beauty, but to-night it merely seemed to irritate him.

"What's that you've got in your hand?" he demanded roughly. "Somebody else want some money, eh?"

Imogen bit her lips and told herself that she had deserved this.

"On the contrary," she told him serenely, "it's a letter thanking you for your previous kindness."

"Ha!" said Brearley sarcastically, with a short laugh. "Something new, that. Who's it from?"

"Miriam Hoad," replied his wife.

"Damn Miriam Hoad!" cried Brearley with savage fervour, colouring to the roots of his hair.

Imogen perfectly understood the implication of this unfor-

tunate remark, and she felt her good resolutions flying to the winds.

"She's a particular friend of mine, you know," she observed with that chilly Armitage calm which so annoyed the excitable Brearley.

"Oh, your particular friends!" threw out her husband in a curious tone. "They're a rum lot. Most of them want money for something or other, as far as I can make out, and don't mind asking for it."

Imogen's dark eyes flashed in a look which bade her husband beware lest he had gone too far. He sat up and gave a vague laugh.

"That's a pretty little girl, her niece," he threw out in an obvious attempt to be conciliatory.

Imogen frowned, puzzled, and then said, "Oh, you mean Ivy?"

"I don't know her name," said Brearley. "I know she's that Hoad woman's niece, that's all. She works for us in Booth Street, you know—sharp little thing."

Imogen nodded thoughtfully.

"How much does Ivy earn a week?" she enquired.

Her husband mentioned a sum which he said was the approximate amount of Ivy's wage.

"You really have been very good to those people, Brearley," said Imogen seriously, turning to him.

"I'm glad you think I'm good to somebody," said Brearley with a sarcastic inflexion. He did not, however, seem particularly pleased, and his eyes wandered over his wife's face in a glance of hard suspicion. "Why don't you shut the door and sit down, and let's have coffee," he continued irritably, "instead of standing there like a plaster statue? And tell her to bring some sandwiches or something to eat with it—I'm hungry."

Imogen, her patience exhausted, gave an exasperated sigh

as she crossed to the hearth to ring the bell. "You think of nothing but things to eat and drink," she observed with contempt. Her husband's rough response to her attempt at concilation had hardened her heart again and made her remember all the things she disliked in him—this, she felt, was the way he had received poor Johnnie.

"And whose fault was it that I missed my dinner, I should like to know?" demanded Brearley resentfully.

Imogen shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, mine, of course," she said in a provocative tone. "How could it have been yours?"

"What do you mean by that?" enquired Brearley suspiciously.

"What do you think?" threw out his wife.

"Something high-flown, I expect," observed her husband.

"Then why try to understand it?" countered Imogen coldly.

At this Brearley swore, whereupon his wife raised her eyebrows.

The entrance of the maid brought a merely temporary cessation to this open bickering, which, now that it had begun, continued more or less constantly throughout the next few months. Nothing could be done to materialise Brearley's promised benevolence until Luke should return, as he was expected to do just before Christmas, from South Wales, where he was now acting as locum to a man on sick leave. The subject of Luke was, therefore, temporarily in abeyance; both Brearley and Imogen were weary after their recent struggle, and Imogen was ashamed of her part in it, while Brearley heartily desired peace; so that an opportunity seemed to offer for a reconciliation which should become permanent. But in the heart of each was something dark and bitter, the fruit of past differences and present suspicions; and, instead, everything seemed to turn, as it had done that night in the library, to contention between them.

Their fears about Richard's mental development, though unfortunately far from baseless, had proved somewhat exaggerated, and from being a mere invalid, entirely under Imogen's care, he now emerged from the nursery as a definite personality, an interesting though curious and puny little boy, who had meals with his parents and asked a multitude of queer questions. Brearley suddenly took a fancy to him as strong as his previous indifference; he told anecdotes about him, gloried in his childish sayings, and liked to wander about the garden with Richard's pale little hand in his. He was, however—characteristically enough—over-indulgent and sharp by turns with his son, and when Imogen had to forbid, in the interests of Richard's health, some rash pleasure which his father had promised him, Brearley resented it and made sarcastic remarks to the child about his mother's interference, in Imogen's presence. Imogen thought this the height of infamy, and scorned to take reprisals on similar lines; but when Richard was not there she told Brearley frankly what she thought of his behaviour, both in that respect and in several others. Imogen had long since learned all Brearley's faults and conned them by rote, but in the past she had dealt with them tenderly, expending an infinite delicacy and tact on their correction, so as not to wound his self-respect. Now she cast them bluntly in his teeth. On the way home from dining out, for example, she sometimes informed her husband, without circumlocution, that he had drunk too much, and if she happened to catch his eye in public when he was in the act of committing this error, she did not hesitate to let her glance reveal what she was thinking. This untender handling made Brearley defiant; he grew restive under his wife's supremacy, which he had never questioned before, drank rather more than he would otherwise have done in order to annoy Imogen, and took to making sarcastic remarks about henpecked husbands. Imogen and Brearley did not regard themselves as being on bad terms,

and they still enjoyed occasional friendly moments; but they snapped at each other at meal-times, and each disapproved on principle of the smallest thing the other did. Imogen still dutifully bade her husband a wifely farewell in the morning, and received him in the evening as though his return was a pleasure to her; but Brearley's kisses on these occasions were often perfunctory, and his wife received them on a marble cheek.

The approach of Christmas, the first Christmas in which Richard had really been able to take any interest, rather mollified their acerbities, and Christmas schemes for his happiness—hospitalities, decorations, presents—drew them temporarily together, though even here they differed over what was suitable and what was not, and expressed their differences with petulance. Mrs. Thornton and Harriet were invited to stay at Roebuck Hall for the whole of the festive season, and the Armitages were to spend Christmas Day there. Dinner was to be eaten in the middle of the day for Richard's benefit; a tree with coloured balls and lighted candles was to astonish his eyes in the library; the table was to glitter with crackers; and the pudding was to appear encircled with blue flames. All the pictures were festooned with holly and mistletoe, and innumerable parcels were tied up in coloured paper and inscribed with Richard's name; altogether extensive preparations were made for the celebration of a thoroughly traditional Christmas Day. Imogen threw herself heartily into all this, and Brearley enjoyed arranging the more substantial part of the day's entertainment, for in the choosing of viands he was unsurpassed. A programme for the whole day was drawn up, and it was decided that, in the calm of Christmas afternoon, when the presents had all been distributed and Richard had retired to the nursery for his daily nap, Luke and Brearley should smoke in the library while the ladies slept or talked

in the drawing-room; and over one of his excellent cigars Brearley should offer to lend Luke the necessary money to set him up in the medical profession. Imogen was rather nervous about this arrangement, and would have preferred to communicate her husband's offer to Luke herself, for she doubted Brearley's tact and feared Luke's pride; but Brearley looked the picture of aggrieved astonishment when she suggested this, and threw out so many sarcastic remarks about the way she wanted to manage him in everything, from his income to his shirt-studs, that she gave way, trusting that the conviviality of the season might mellow both men's tempers and bring the interview to a successful conclusion.

She awoke on Christmas morning feeling happier than she had done for a long time, and running along to the nursery carried Richard and his just-discovered stocking back to her own room, where she spent a happy hour with her husband and her child. She could not dislike Brearley when, laughing heartily the while, he allowed Richard to clamber over his chest and roll oranges down his outstretched arm, though she had one or two brief moments of sadness when she stood between the child's deficient understanding and his father's perception of it. She resolutely, however, suppressed these pangs, and reflected with pleasure on the brightening of Luke's future which was now so near at hand. The morning did nothing to dim her pleasure; the weather was bright and frosty, a thin powdering of snow lay seasonably on the hills, the service at church appealed to Imogen's maternal feelings, and the Armitages arrived punctually, with cheerful faces.

At dinner, however, things did not go so well. Harriet seemed nervous and constrained. Luke despised traditional Christmas customs as mere superstition, and though he lent himself to them for Richard's sake, he did it with an air of reserve and a rather gloomy brow. Imogen suspected

that a good deal of his gloom would be dissipated by Brearley's post-prandial announcement, and she managed to convey this notion to her husband, but not before Brearley had thrown out a few irritable sentences about Luke's aloofness. As the meal went on Imogen began to feel that the gathering had perhaps been a mistake, for poor little Richard was confused by the unusually large number of people present, and his pathetic difference from other children became more evident. Mrs. Thornton repressed him impatiently once or twice, after her wont, and Richard gave her a scared but sullen look—there was no love lost between Richard and his paternal grandmother. Brearley made the worse, though more natural, mistake of drawing the dazed child into prominence, addressing to him in a loud tone complicated questions and insisting with jocular violence on a reply. Then, too, the Thorntons' hospitality always seemed to Imogen a trifle too lavish, too insistent for good taste, and to-day she winced under Brearley's loud urgings and Mrs. Thornton's well-meant commendations of the abundant food. The fact was that Brearley was dining not wisely but too well, and his mother, instead of seconding Imogen's restraining efforts, encouraged him. The climax came when Brearley, hot and hilarious, with a shaking hand, poured some champagne into a glass and passed it joyously down to Richard to be tasted. The perplexed child, fingering the stem of the pretty glass, whose shape attracted him, looked up to his mother for guidance, with a glance between eagerness and timidity. Imogen, a sudden fury of disgust in her heart, smiled reassuringly at him, and said mildly, shaking her head, "No, I think not, dear." She moved the glass away into the middle of the table.

"Why not?" shouted Brearley laughingly from the other end of the table. "Go along, Imogen! Don't be so silly! Why shouldn't he have it? It won't do him any harm."

"No, of course it won't," Mrs. Thornton supported him.

"I'd rather he didn't," returned Imogen coldly.

Brearley, still laughing, left his place and came down to his little son, and picking up the glass offered it to the child's lips. "Just have a taste, lovey," he said.

"Brearley!" exclaimed Imogen in extreme anger, stretching out her hand for the glass. "Please don't do that; the child is not to have it." Her fingers met her husband's round the stem, and Brearley, with a laughing glance at her, seemed inclined to retain them. She looked up into his red perspiring face with loathing. "I mean it," she said emphatically.

"Oh, well, all right, have it your own way," said Brearley with cheerful good-humour, relinquishing the glass and returning to his seat. "You make such a fuss about nothing, Imogen; the poor boy'll be a perfect mollycoddle when he grows up."

"There are things worse than mollycoddles," threw out Imogen with bitterness, offering Richard some water.

Her husband's face clouded. "Oh, you think so, do you?" he enquired in that tone of jeering sarcasm he so often employed to his wife nowadays. "You surprise me, I must say."

He finished the meal in moody silence, drinking a good deal more than he really desired, as Imogen saw, out of defiance to his wife. She considered whether to mollify him by some allusion to Richard's delicacy as the cause of her interference, but decided against it—the battle on the point he had raised might as well be fought now as later, and she did not wish to confuse the issue. She remembered Brearley's forthcoming interview with Luke, and sighed to find its omens so unfavourable.

The Christmas-tree, however, raised everyone's spirits. Brearley stood beside it and handed out each parcel with a jocular comment, obviously enjoying his rôle. Richard's

childish delight with his many sumptuous presents was very natural and normal, and his nurse swept him off to the nursery before he became too tired. In pursuance of her project Imogen thereupon led the other three women to the drawing-room, where they relaxed from their recent Christmas enthusiam to quiet comfort. Mrs. Thornton established herself in a chair by the huge glowing fire and slept noisily, her hands folded across her stomach. Mrs. Armitage turned over the glossy leaves of an illustrated weekly until it became too dark for her to see, when she too slept, but with her customary air of composure and restraint. Imogen and her sister-in-law sat side by side on a comfortable couch, half asleep, and carried on a desultory conversation—Imogen could see that Harriet was absorbed in the progress of her love-affair; her face was soft and thoughtful, and she glanced at the door from time to time in the hope of seeing Luke enter. Imogen sighed; quite apart from its bearing on her own affairs she was not particularly glad that Luke's wife was to be a Thornton. As the winter dusk deepened snow began to fall steadily, and the room seemed very warm and comfortable and glowing by contrast with the whirling white flakes outside the windows. Imogen gazed out, her eyes wide and fixed, and thought of many things—Miriam, for example, who was still at Southport; this weather would be bitter for her.

This post-prandial repose was broken by a distant sound of voices. Harriet started slightly and looked at her sister-in-law, who gave her a reassuring smile. As the sound increased Imogen murmured: "They must have opened the library door—I suppose they're coming here now. Is it time for tea?" She bent her head and tried to see the hands of her watch in the firelight, and not being successful, rose and put on a light. Mrs. Thornton stirred and snorted, sat up with a start and demanded abruptly, still half asleep, "What's the

matter?" She rubbed her eyes and readjusted her spectacles, then enquired with returning wakefulness: "What's going on? Why is Brearley shouting so?"

"I don't know," replied Imogen faintly. She began to fear some great disaster, for the sound of the two men's voices was now unmistakable—they were quarrelling, and the noise of their quarrel filled the house. Poor Harriet, aghast, positively trembled, and gazed imploringly at her sister-in-law; Mrs. Armitage, who had also woken at the coming of the light, sat erect and looked extremely uneasy.

"Well, dear me!" said Mrs. Thornton with an expostulatory sniff. "What can the matter be now, I wonder?" Nobody answered her, and as the sounds continued to increase in violence her stupid comely face took on an air of serious alarm.

"Go to them, Imogen," urged Mrs. Armitage impatiently in a low tone.

"Yes, you go—they'll perhaps take more notice of you than of anyone else," agreed Mrs. Thornton, much disturbed.

Imogen rose and went out, sick at heart. Dreading she knew not what, she took the precaution to close the door behind her. As she reached the threshold of the library the door was flung open and Brearley stormed into the hall. He was almost beside himself with rage; the blood had rushed to his face, the veins in his temples were swollen, and perspiration stood thickly on his forehead. He shouted violently at his wife in thick unintelligible tones in which she could distinguish no coherent phrase, and threw his arms about. She was, however, successful in leading him back into the room and closing the door, though he shouted "Leave me alone, Imogen!" and threw off her hand.

"What has happened?" she demanded faintly of Luke, who was standing by the hearth, looking very pale and extremely angry.

Luke shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"He wants to marry Harriet!" shouted Brearley at the top of his voice.

"Well, that's no news," suggested Imogen pacifically, adopting a homely phrase to soothe his nerves.

"But it is news; by God, it's news!" cried Brearley, striking his clenched fist violently on the table. "It's news to me whether it is to you or not. Did you know about it before, eh?"

Imogen hesitated. "I guessed," she said.

"You knew!" cried Brearley wildly. "By God, Imogen! I wouldn't have believed it of you. That's why you were so anxious for Harriet to have her fair share, is it? I see it all now."

"Leave Imogen alone, Thornton," put in Luke with cold distaste. "She has nothing to do with it."

Brearley turned savagely on him, and told him with violence that he would rather see Harriet dead than married to his brother-in-law.

"If you object to me so much why did you offer to help me get a practice?" enquired Luke, who was equally furious and could hardly contain himself under his host's insults. "Naturally I thought you'd realised that Harriet and I love each other, and that by helping me to a practice you meant to help me to win her. Otherwise I shouldn't have mentioned Harriet to you yet—I shouldn't have spoken to you about Harriet to-day if you hadn't offered to help me. I didn't regard myself as in a position to speak to you about her, because I haven't spoken to Harriet herself yet."

"Not in a position!" sneered Brearley, wilfully misunderstanding him. "No, I should say not. But apart from that you know I hate the sight of you; I'd rather see Harriet dead than married to you."

"If you hate me like that why did you insult me by of-

fering me help?" demanded Luke again with fierce contempt.

"You'd better ask Imogen that," said Brearley with a sneer. "She nagged and nagged at me till she got me to say I would. You're all alike, you Armitages—after money, all the time; and we don't want another one in the family, thank you. One at a time's enough. Now I understand why Imogen was so keen about Harriet's fair share—it was you put her up to it."

"What do you take me for?" shouted Luke, losing his self-control abruptly.

"I take you for Imogen's brother," shouted Brearley in return. "That's enough for me. Let me tell you, Armitage, once and for all, that if Harriet marries you she shall never touch a penny of mine!"

"I don't want your damned money!" cried Luke.

"Ha! I believe you," said Brearley sarcastically. He turned and flung open the door behind him.

"Where are you going?" demanded his wife in icy tones.

"Out of the house till your relations leave it," said her husband over his shoulder. He left the room, staggering from excess of emotion, and a few minutes later the violent closing of the front door announced that he had carried out this threat.

"Why did you interfere?" said Luke then in angry reproach to his sister. "Why should you think it necessary to persuade him to offer me help?"

Imogen shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

"You've spoiled everything," continued Luke bitterly. "I thought he was doing it of his own accord, because of Harriet, and I was touched and grateful, and of course I mentioned her. In any case it wouldn't have been honourable not to mention her when he was practically enabling me to marry. Now everything's spoilt; he's Harriet's guard-

ian, and I don't suppose he'll let me come near her till she's of age."

"I don't suppose he will," said Imogen with affected indifference.

"Still," said Luke more hopefully, "he can't really keep us apart if Harriet sticks to me, you know."

"Probably not," agreed Imogen. "But I think you'd better go now."

"You needn't remind me of that," said Luke haughtily. "It's not a pleasant experience, being asked to leave the house. Perhaps you'll tell mother that we're going at once."

"I shall keep mother for the night," Imogen informed him in a flat, indifferent tone. "But you'd better go immediately."

Luke turned on his heel and withdrew.

Imogen took a few minutes to compose herself before returning to the drawing-room, where for Mrs. Armitage's benefit she invented a highly improbable fiction which represented Luke and Brearley as having set out to dine together at a Bradford restaurant. Nobody believed this story, but they observed the conventions and pretended to accept it, which was all that Imogen required. Having despatched Mrs. Armitage and Harriet upstairs to see Richard bathed, Imogen admitted to Mrs. Thornton that the two men had been quarrelling on the subject of her daughter; and discovered that Mrs. Thornton's attitude to Luke's pretensions—of which she was not ignorant—was on the whole one of approval. Mrs. Thornton had always liked Luke, and he was, as she said, a professional man; her view seemed to be that Harriet might go farther and fare worse—she really seemed to care for him, and it was not as if the child had many, or indeed, any, other suitors. Indeed, her tone seemed to indicate that she had much less objection to Luke's marrying Harriet than to Imogen's marrying Brearley. Partly this

was due, as Imogen reflected with a sense of her own just dealing, to that instinct in mothers whereby a daughter's marriage is regarded as a triumph and a son's as a disaster; but partly it was personal, and due to Richard. She hardened her heart at this thought, and spoke in a cold, worldly fashion which upset Mrs. Thornton, who complained that she seemed not to take into account the feeling of Luke and Harriet for each other.

"Oh yes, I do," said Imogen carelessly. She did not explain her real feeling about the matter, which was that Harriet was so timid that the approval of the families concerned was a factor almost more important than Harriet's gentle love.

As the evening wore on and Brearley did not appear his mother grew very uneasy; Harriet, abruptly deprived of her lover without apparent cause, looked miserable, and Mrs. Armitage seemed restless and perplexed, and only accepted Imogen's invitation to stay the night after having personally inspected the deepening snow. Altogether it was a wretched evening, and Imogen was heartily glad when it was over.

When she was at last in bed she lay awake for some hours, her eyes dry and burning, going over in her mind the various incidents of the day, and abandoning herself to a fierce resentment against her husband. Imogen herself felt so irritated by Luke's preference for Harriet that Brearley's irritation seemed not unnatural, but his insults to herself were the more unendurable because Imogen was not altogether sure that they were undeserved. Whenever she thought of this, however, the odious picture of Brearley offering wine to Richard rose before her and blotted out her own misdeeds; the mere remembrance of that odious scene made her exclaim and toss angrily from side to side, and all the sins of omission towards his son of which Brearley had ever been guilty stood out black and horrible before her eyes. And then his insults

to the scrupulously honourable Luke! Really the Thorntons were simply intolerable! At length she fell into an uneasy slumber, from which she was awakened by loud, reverberating blows which seemed to come from near at hand. She sat up hastily, put on a light, and perceived that attacks were being made on the door between her room and her husband's. She slipped on a wrap, went to the door and flung it open, and found her husband standing on the threshold, swaying uncertainly from one foot to the other. His face was flushed and his garb rather dishevelled; he breathed heavily, hanging his head, and his blue eyes were bloodshot.

"What do you want?" asked Imogen.

"What've you locked the door for?" demanded Brearley in a tone of intense grievance, slurring his words into each other in a manner which showed that he had been indulging his fondness for good things to drink rather more than was desirable.

"Did you expect me to leave it open after what you said to me this afternoon?" enquired Imogen coldly.

"I didn't mean it," muttered Brearley, struck by her magnificent if rather hard beauty as she stood before him in her silken draperies, with her pale tragic face and commanding figure.

"Besides," added Imogen with contempt, "you're drunk."

Brearley winced as if she had struck him, and crimsoned. "I'm not," he protested in a tone of childish remonstrance. "Damn it all! I'm not, Imogen."

Unfortunately every word he said merely corroborated his wife's assertion. He put out a wavering hand and grasped her wrist. Imogen wrenched it from him, shut the door in his face and locked it.

III

After this exchange of insults the relations between Brearley and his wife went rapidly from bad to worse, and scenes became frequent at Roebuck Hall, though at first it was tacitly understood between them, and observed on each side with a certain loyalty, that these should not take place before the family of either, or the world at large. When, on descending to a late breakfast on the Boxing Day following his rupture with Luke, Brearley found his mother-in-law still in the house, he made Imogen a particularly violent scene, and categorically forbade her to entertain Mrs. Armitage or Luke again at Roebuck Hall—he had had enough of them, he said, and one Armitage at a time was as much as he could stand, if not more. In the New Year Luke, who in default of his brother-in-law's help seemed to be doomed to a peripatetic career, went away again, this time to a country town in one of the Yorkshire dales; but Mrs. Armitage remained at home in Hudley, and Imogen amused herself by defying Brearley's ban on her mother's presence. She invited Mrs. Armitage to Roebuck Hall at her pleasure, merely choosing a time when Brearley was out, and taking the trouble to see that her mother, to whom she did not mention the reason for these manœuvres, left the house before her husband entered it. She thus made the servants her tacit accomplices; from time to time they accidentally or of set purpose betrayed Mrs. Armitage's recent presence to their master, when Brearley's fury was unbounded. In spite of all this, however, Brearley for a long time remained liable to experience occasional moments of regret, when he spoke

affectionately to his wife, kissed her, and complained that she was very unkind to him nowadays, and shouldn't take what he said so seriously. But on these occasions Imogen merely snubbed him; indeed, whatever he said she always snubbed him—she picked holes in his arguments, sighed audibly when his incoherent sentences became more than usually involved, and perceptibly restrained herself from being sarcastic to him when other people were present.

Under this treatment it was not surprising that Brearley's temper grew more and more unreliable, and that he sought comfort in drinking considerably more than he ought; with no one to keep him up to the mark by tender care he deteriorated both physically and mentally, becoming rather gross in appearance and rude and capricious in his behaviour. He turned, too, against Richard again; he was not exactly unkind to the child, but he teased him roughly, and interviews between them usually ended in Richard's tears. Imogen kept the child out of his way as much as possible, and Brearley never asked for his son when he was not visible. Altogether, anyone who met Brearley for the first time during this period considered that his wife had valid reasons for disliking him, as she so obviously did; he was not the man he had been in the days of his early married life.

Imogen, too, gradually changed. In order to be hurt by nothing—she had received hurts enough, and meant to bear no more—she pretended indifference to everything, and this simulated indifference gradually encroached upon her feelings and became real. To Brearley's fury she had her hair cut short, which made her look older and harder; she also took to wearing gowns and jewellery of a much more elaborate and expensive kind than had satisfied her formerly. Hitherto she had taken pride in keeping her personal wants few and simple, but now she became reckless and extravagant, for she felt that life owed her every compensation it could pos-

sibly afford. All the great and fine things of life, the things worth being unselfish for, were denied her; and therefore life owed her everything else—the small pleasures were her due, and she would be ruthless in claiming them. However many pleasures she had, they could but be golden dots against the black background of her wretched home life; the only thing to do, if life was to be endurable at all, was to diversify as much of the background as possible in that way. She bought whatever took her fancy, and was satisfied with nothing long; to Brearley's horror—she had never done anything like that before—she ran up enormous bills. She extracted from her husband, in one of his more amiable moments, a small but high-powered car, in which she drove her mother and Richard about the country at a rather reckless speed, for she was a good driver, and liked to let Brearley know that irritating fact. She entertained women largely—she had had enough of men—went out a very great deal, and was rarely seen in company with her husband; if Brearley's plans for amusement clashed with Imogen's, it was always Imogen's which won the day. Amusement became the chief occupation of her life, for charitable societies no longer met in her drawing-room or gained her support; the only unselfish gift she made was her cheque to Miriam Hoad, which, with the gradual decline of Miriam's health, had now become almost a quarterly affair. Imogen heartily wished that no such person as Miriam had ever existed, because it was Miriam who had advised her to marry, but her sense of honour forbade her to withdraw help from the elder woman simply because she had innocently injured her. She took a perverse pride in paying the sum—since she could not now ask Brearley for it, or even mention Miriam Hoad to him—from money which should have been devoted to the housekeeping, or which he had given her for other purposes, and this did not tend to make things

smoother between herself and her husband. In spite of their precautions the High Roebuck natives shook their heads over the pair, and took sides over the interesting question of which was the more to blame.

The affair between Luke and Harriet proved lasting, and was the source of endless argument and discord in the Armitage and Thornton families. As it turned out, Luke did not return to live in Hudley. Work in his flourishing little market town seemed to suit him and be well within his scope, and he proved a great success there, so great that the doctor he had been replacing retained him as his permanent assistant. His prospects, though still paltry according to Thornton ideas, were thus very much improved, and his aspirations for Harriet became not unreasonable from the worldliest point of view; but Brearley continued to withhold his consent to any engagement, in spite of earnest representations from Mrs. Thornton, who seemed to have realised that her daughter would never be happy unless she married Luke. This feeling was perhaps strengthened in her mind by the fact that nobody else seemed to wish to marry Harriet, and Mrs. Thornton did not believe in unmarried daughters. Mrs. Armitage, who was looking, Imogen noticed with regret, increasingly worn and haggard during these years, did not offer the match between her son and Harriet any warm support, and was not excessively cordial to her prospective daughter-in-law. Whether this was due to her contempt for Harriet in particular, or a dislike of the Thorntons in general, Imogen could not discover, but her absence of enthusiasm was so marked that at last even Mrs. Thornton noticed it. As she sat with Imogen one morning in the nursery, where Richard was in bed with some childish ailment, she grumbled that she was sure she did not wish Harriet to enter any family where she was not wanted.

"Mothers never like their sons to marry," said Imogen in

her worldliest tone, holding up to the light the silken undergarment she was making.

Mrs. Thornton with a slight shamefaced titter admitted the justice of this observation, but hinted that there was no need for Mrs. Armitage to be so very condescending about the affair. "Harriet's not doing so very well for herself as all that in marrying Luke, you know," she grumbled.

"At least she'll know that her husband will always come home sober," flashed out Imogen at this, "which is more than some of us do."

"Well, Imogen, you drive him to it," expostulated Mrs. Thornton angrily with tears in her eyes, understanding the allusion only too well. "I'm sure there's neither peace nor comfort for him in this house nowadays. And it's his house, after all."

Imogen arched her eyebrows and looked scornful, and there was a pause.

"If you can't make allowances for his little faults," said her mother-in-law then with tearful dignity, "I think it would have been better if you hadn't married Brearley, Imogen."

"I think so, too," agreed Imogen coldly.

She placidly continued her sewing, and Mrs. Thornton watched her calm stitches in stupefaction.

"I don't know what to make of you, Imogen," she said at last in despair. "You used to be so kind and gentle when you were first married. I don't know what's come over you, I'm sure." As Imogen did not enlighten her, she added in a kinder tone: "It's my belief you've never been yourself since Richard was born."

Imogen tacitly accepted this suggestion as being convenient, and in some degree—though not in the way her mother-in-law meant it—correct. Mrs. Thornton sighed, and began with her customary clumsiness to hint that perhaps another

child would make everything right again. After a glance at her daughter-in-law's set mouth and hard face, however, she desisted, and went unhappily away. When she reached home and began to think about this interview she decided that Imogen had been extremely insolent and rude; and she ceased to frequent Roebuck Hall in the casual informal manner which had hitherto been customary with her. When she wished to see her son she usually sent for him; and it came to be understood that on these occasions Imogen stayed at home. Brearley pretended to be annoyed when he was thus bidden to Roebuck Dene, but he rarely failed to comply with his mother's wishes in this respect; and each time he went he seemed to return more estranged from Imogen.

Mrs. Thornton continued, however, to urge her son to let Harriet marry Luke with his consent and a proper settlement; while Harriet herself opposed a frank if rather schoolgirlish defiance to her brother's veto on her engagement. Luke had found means to lay his suit before Harriet, and she had accepted it; she now wore Luke's signet ring on her second finger instead of her third—which maddened Brearley—wrote Luke very long letters every day, and declined to go to parties and other such youthful entertainments. Harriet's morals had the clear-cut severity of youth, and she was shocked by Imogen's worldliness; it was impossible, too, that she should not see and deplore the widening rift between Imogen and her husband. But if Imogen were unfair to Brearley she loved Luke, while Brearley was very unfair to Luke, and thus poor Harriet's allegiance was divided. These things were altogether too difficult for her, and as time went on she began to look rather pale and forlorn under the stress of her contradictory emotions, especially as Brearley teased her roughly about her alleged engagement, as he called it, every time she came to Roebuck Hall. He was fond of telling her that she should never have a penny

of the Thornton money if she married Luke. At this Harriet's fair, serious face never failed to hang out prompt signals of distress; she always threw back her head and told him, with considerable pride and more spirit than Imogen had imagined her to possess, that she did not want his money, nor did Luke.

"Ha!" Brearley was wont to say grimly at this, with an accent of incredulity which wounded his sensitive sister beyond bearing. "Well, on those terms I'll give my consent to the match—when you're of age."

These scenes always irritated Imogen, and she found that she was not as fond of Harriet now as she had been in the past; the girl's crude little theories, her romantic airs, her smooth, earnest young face, her impracticable ideals and proud reserve—in Imogen's view she had nothing to be reserved about—all irritated the elder and more experienced woman. One Sunday, when Luke had come over to Royd Bank for the week-end and they were discussing Brearley's obduracy, Imogen said to her brother with some impatience:

"I can't think what you want with Harriet, Luke. Why should you fall in love with Harriet out of all the girls in the West Riding?"

Luke coloured and hesitated. "Well, for one thing," he said, "she reminds me very much of you."

"Of me?" cried Imogen in horrified amazement.

"Not as you are now," explained Luke hastily, "but as you used to be, you know, in the old Royd Bank days. She has the same beautiful expression that you had then." His voice hardened as he added: "You've changed so much lately, Imogen, haven't you?"

That Luke, alienated from Imogen because life had laid rough hands on her and marred her, should love Harriet because he thought the child resembled Imogen before that

process began, was a piece of irony which tasted very bitter to his sister. Luke's love for Harriet had once kept Imogen from leaving Brearley, certainly, but it had also brought about that final ruin of her married life which had spoiled her nature and changed her, in Luke's eyes, so much for the worse. Her assumed indifference pierced for once, Imogen gasped reproachfully: "You're cruel, Luke!"

"I don't see why," contended Luke, gazing stubbornly at her through his glasses. "I thought I was paying you a compliment."

"Rather an ambiguous one, my dear," Imogen managed to say composedly—nowdays for defensive purposes she often used her mother's drawl.

BOOK VI

CONCLUSIONS

I

Brearley had jested so often about the terms on which he would consent to a marriage between Luke and Harriet that when at last Harriet came of age and Luke, now in receipt of a moderate but steady income, was urgent to marry her on those very terms, he could not readily find an excuse for belying his own word. There was a period of delay and uncertainty, during which Brearley made himself as disagreeable as possible to all concerned, and then he threw out casually to Imogen at breakfast one morning that he was going to see Hesketh that day about Harriet.

"About Harriet?" repeated Imogen enquiringly, though she knew quite well to what he referred.

"She's set on marrying Luke, it seems," said Brearley grimly.

"You surely don't mean to carry out that absurd threat?" exclaimed Imogen, hoping to influence him by her air of complete incredulity.

"Oh, I don't, don't I?" shouted her husband in tones so suddenly loud that Richard paused with his spoon in mid-air and gazed interestedly at his father's crimsoning face. "By God I do!" concluded Brearley with feeling. "Mind you tell Luke so."

Imogen shrugged her shoulders and was silent. She was not quite sure where her duty lay. If Harriet had wished to marry anyone but Luke, her course would have been clear, and she would have striven by every means in her power to make Brearley behave generously to his sister. But as it was the issue seemed confused and doubtful, and she could not

but remember Brearley's previous insults to her on the subject. When Richard had retired to his morning's occupations, however, she did attempt a remonstrance with her husband in Harriet's favour, telling him frankly that his behaviour was unjust and even—considering that he was to all intents and purposes Harriet's trustee—immoral.

"You're on that tack again, are you?" muttered Brearley.

"Your father never intended that you should have all and Harriet nothing," concluded Imogen.

"There are a lot of things in this house that father never intended," said Brearley with gloomy sarcasm.

"I don't understand how you can calmly set about to defraud Harriet of her rights in this way," pursued Imogen. "I should never rest if I had done it."

"I dare say you wouldn't," said Brearley in a meaning tone, obviously intending to refer to Imogen's kinship with Luke.

"I suppose you mean that to be insulting," said Imogen, beginning to lose her temper.

Brearley sniffed and intimated roughly that he did mean it so.

"Do you imagine that *I* want Harriet to marry Luke?" cried Imogen. "I assure you there is nothing I want less."

"Then mind you tell Luke that Harriet won't have a penny," said Brearley with a jeering laugh, rising from the table. "That might have the desired effect, eh?"

Imogen, furious, said nothing more for the moment. She thought the matter over during the day, however, and when her husband returned to the house that evening she opened the subject again by asking what young Hesketh thought of the proposed alterations.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" gibed Brearley. As Imogen said nothing further, he continued: "You're very anxious to know what's in that will, aren't you?"

"Have you made *another* new one?" said Imogen in the scornful tone she kept for Brearley's activities. "Really it's a mania with you, Brearley."

"I suppose I can make a will if I like without consulting Mrs. Armitage?" shouted Brearley in one of his sudden furies.

"What do you mean?" demanded Imogen, colouring.

"You know perfectly well what I mean," grumbled her husband. "Don't be so high and mighty, Imogen; I'm sick of it. I shall do what I like with my own property, whether it suits the Armitages or not."

"Pray do—I should be sorry to stop you making a laughing-stock of yourself if you really wished to be one," said Imogen, trembling with rage.

"Ha! I dare say you would," returned Brearley, undisturbed. "He laughs best who laughs last, however. We shall see."

After this Imogen simply could not bring herself to open the subject again, and a few days later Brearley brought home a document which he locked up in his safe with a great air of triumph. Imogen viewed this final disinheritance of Harriet with extreme concern, and felt a strong inclination to tell young Hesketh what she thought of him as a family solicitor. Harriet, she felt, had from the material point of view good cause to wish that she had never seen the Armitages. On the other hand, she had gained from them a good education and a lover, so it was difficult to adjust the balance. Imogen reflected hopefully that Brearley had such a passion for altering his will that he would probably make dozens before one was likely to be put in operation, and that his feelings towards Harriet might be mellowed by the passage of time. Meanwhile, however, he made Luke a definite written statement that he had eliminated Harriet from his will, and did not intend to make her any allowance during

his lifetime. Luke expressed himself perfectly content, nay charmed, with this arrangement; and one dull autumn morning he and Harriet were finally married on this understanding.

The wedding, which took place in the High Roebuck church, was a small one by the desire of both Brearley and Luke, only relations being invited to attend. Luke would have preferred a registrar's office to a church, but Mrs. Thornton held up her hands in horror at the mere suggestion, and Luke was too anxious to take his bride away from the influence of Roebuck Hall, which he detested, to cause any further trouble on this point. Brearley gave way to his mother's pleading sufficiently to promise to be present at the wedding, but he refused to take any part in the ceremony; so an uncle of Mrs. Thornton's side was produced to give Harriet away—a procedure which naturally caused much talk in the village.

The day of Luke's wedding was a particularly miserable one for Imogen.

It chanced to be the beginning of the autumn quarter, and a host of Imogen's bills had come in that morning, addressed —obviously in desperation, for several of them were marked "account rendered"—to her husband. Brearley had been justly angry, and the ensuing scene delayed Imogen—or she said it did; she was rather apt to be unpunctual nowadays —in arranging her dress for the ceremony. Brearley, already complete with silk hat and buttonhole, shouted up the stairs to her, whistled, and sent a maid up twice to inform her that the car was at the door, and it was time they were going. Imogen spent much longer over her toilet now than in the first days of her marriage, and this attempt to hurry her was irritating; to keep her husband quiet she sent Richard, who was proudly wearing his best white suit with many pockets, down to him as a sign that she would appear

shortly. While they were waiting for her in the hall Brearley amused himself by throwing out alarming pleasantries to Richard on the subject of the terrible things which happened to little boys who transgressed in any way the complicated etiquette of weddings. Their grandmothers, he hinted, were always particularly severe in these cases. Richard, who was nervous and easily upset, and always apprehensive of what Mrs. Thornton would do or say to him, cried; and when his mother appeared ran to her and begged to be allowed to stay at home. Brearley, highly delighted with this ironical touch, laughed and encouraged him in his plea, saying that he only wished he could stay at home as well. It was now Imogen's turn to be angry. Almost the only pure happiness she had left was to see Richard behaving as a normal child, and if he stayed away from his aunt's wedding the village would shake its collective head sadly and murmur that the poor child wasn't fit to be there. Besides, both Harriet and Luke were very fond of Richard and had been good to him; and his absence would give Harriet, in particular, real pain. Imogen, therefore, comforted Richard as much as possible, but insisted on his accompanying them in the car.

All the way to church Richard cried, while Imogen and Brearley bickered, so that by the time they reached the building Imogen's mood was quite unsuited to bouquets, bridesmaids, orange blossoms, wedding marches, sentimental hymns, and other such idealisations of the entrance to the married state. She glanced along at her husband when Luke and Harriet were pronounced man and wife, and saw tears in his eyes, which, however, were not fixed on his sister but on various young girls, Harriet's friends, who had come to see her married and were sitting in the gallery for that purpose. He was probably, decided Imogen, visualising another and more successful marriage for himself with one of them, and she smiled cynically.

At the wedding breakfast Brearley began by being extremely sarcastic to everyone, Harriet included, about his sister's future bliss; he had already declined to sign the register, and he now refused to appear in the wedding photographs. Presently, however, he drank too much champagne, as he often did on these occasions, and passing from one extreme to the other, became so noisy and facetious with Harriet's bridesmaids that Imogen was relieved when he suddenly looked at his watch and said he must be off to Bradford—he had a business appointment. Her established habit of contradicting him on every possible occasion, however, led her to say "Business to-day?" in a tone of outraged astonishment.

"Somebody's got to do some business sometime," replied Brearley loudly, with a meaning look.

It was an allusion to the morning's bills, and Imogen coloured under it.

When at last the young couple, smiling and happy in spite of the rain which had begun to fall, went off by train from the High Roebuck station, Imogen felt a deep and complicated pang. The course of their love had not run particularly smooth so far, but Imogen thought there was a good chance that the future would bring them the truth and smoothness which her own married life so conspicuously lacked. Harriet was stupid, but sweet and pliable; she would consider everything which Luke did perfection, and adopt all his austere economic and moral theories wholeheartedly. A small country town was the ideal place for her, and perhaps for Luke as well. At the same time Luke's marriage was a great disappointment, a great disillusionment, to his sister. In the old Royd Bank days she had idolised him; he had seemed so strong, so wise, so tender, and she had always imagined him marrying, rather late in life, some not very young and rather ugly, but striking and highly intellectual, woman of real personal distinction. Instead, he had married poor

Harriet with eager haste; and Imogen, though several years younger than her brother, felt herself more mature than Luke nowadays in taste, judgment, conduct, everything. Luke was the soul of goodness and a man of the most absolute integrity, but he was rather naïve and blunt, and his many theories seemed to her ridiculous. Later he might perhaps blossom forth again, but for some years now his development had seemed to be arrested, and Imogen could not help feeling that it was Johnnie's death which had arrested it—while Johnnie was alive Luke basked, as it were, in his friend's brilliance, and his mind expanded beneath those glowing rays.

The wedding party was to visit the theatre that night, but Brearley did not return in time to escort his wife there, so she was obliged to go alone and experience the humiliation of sitting beside an empty seat under the curious glance of Mrs. Thornton's relations. Nowadays Brearley very rarely returned in time to take his wife anywhere; it was really astonishing how many hours he contrived to spend away from Roebuck Hall in haunts of which Imogen knew nothing. Annoyed by his absence, and feeling really lonely now that her long preoccupation with Luke's affairs was ended, Imogen brought Mrs. Armitage back to Roebuck Hall with her for the night. It appeared on enquiry that Brearley had not yet returned; and as the two women were extremely tired after the public tedium of the day they separated at once and went to bed, Imogen urging her mother not to rise early.

Brearley presumably reached Roebuck Hall some time that night and heard of his mother-in-law's presence there, for next morning he sent up a message to his wife, who was breakfasting in her room, saying that he did not expect to be in to lunch, but would be back at three o'clock, and would she kindly be ready to start at that hour. Imogen sighed as she remembered that they were to open a political

bazaar in Hudley that afternoon, for to listen to Brearley attempting to make a speech was an ordeal which she supported badly. The morning was dark and wet, and she idled away the greater part of it in bed, reading; then, having leisurely risen and dressed, went to her mother's room to ask what were her plans for the day. To her surprise Mrs. Armitage was not there; she had evidently wearied of bed before her daughter, and Imogen found her in the nursery, where Richard was just finishing his lessons with his excellent nursery governess. The child then went out for his morning walk, and Imogen and her mother had the room to themselves. Imogen, standing in an easy attitude before the hearth with one hand extended to the blaze, gave a cynical but amusing commentary on the events of the previous day and the rustic appearances of Mrs. Thornton's various relations. Mrs. Armitage, however, did not smile; and Imogen noticed that in the morning light her fine features looked even more tired and worn than they had done the night before.

"Why did you get up so soon when there was no necessity to do so? You should have rested, Mother," she told her. "You don't look at all well; you've been doing too much lately. But, however," she added, "now that Luke and I are both settled in life, you will be able to go away to the sea and have a nice long rest."

There was a note of irony in her voice as she spoke of her own settlement, and Mrs. Armitage sighed.

"Imogen," she began in her calm drawl, raising her eyes to her daughter's, "I am very much worried by the state of affairs between you and Brearley."

"Dear Mother, why?" parried Imogen lightly. "We have no community of tastes, so we each live our own lives and are perfectly satisfied."

"You may be satisfied, but I don't think Brearley is,"

said Mrs. Armitage with some acerbity. "Where do you imagine he was last night?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied Imogen, yawning.

There was a pause.

"I got up early, if you call it early, because I couldn't sleep—I was much too anxious," began Mrs. Armitage again. "And I wished to take this opportunity of telling you the cause of my anxiety. I have debated very much whether I ought to make it known to you or not; but I think it is wise to tell you—I think, indeed, perhaps I ought to tell you—that when I was in Bradford last week at the theatre I saw Brearley there with a girl who is not, I think, one of your acquaintance."

"Really?" said Imogen with indifference, rather amused than otherwise by her mother's solemnity.

"She was fair and *petite,*" continued Mrs. Armitage in her quiet drawl. "A type exactly the opposite of your own." As her daughter offered no remark she burst out suddenly on a high note of grievance: "Don't you *care,* Imogen?"

Imogen shrugged her shoulders. "Not a bit," she said. "Why should I? In this year of grace one theatre doesn't make an intrigue." She added in a murmur: "Nor should I care if it did."

"But it's not the first time I've seen them together," protested Mrs. Armitage energetically. "I've seen him twice before with her, giving her lunch."

"My dear Mother," replied Imogen, "Brearley has a passion for taking girls out to lunch. It means nothing, I assure you."

"It ought to mean something to you," objected Mrs. Armitage in a tone of authority.

"Oh, very possibly," admitted Imogen with a smile. "But I rarely do what I ought nowadays."

As she spoke, however, she remembered the days when Brearley, madly in love with her, used to take her out to lunch, and her smile was rather forced. She had liked him then, and found him kind and jolly. She thought that if she had her married life to live over again she would not let it come to its present wreck; Harriet and Luke and Miss Hoad should be left to manage their own affairs, and she would, after telling Brearley what she thought of his behaviour to Johnnie, forgive him for it. Returning from these excursions in the might-have-been, she decided that even as things were at present Brearley's behaviour had the power to annoy her; she had reigned over him so long that the idea of him positively having the initiative to go out and prefer another woman was really extremely irritating, if nothing more. She exclaimed impulsively:

"Tell me more about her. Was she very young?"

As Mrs. Armitage made no reply she turned an enquiring look on her, and saw that her mother was weeping. This occurrence was so rare that Imogen received quite a shock at the sight of it. She hesitated, then said gently: "I'm sorry if I grieve you, Mother."

Mrs. Armitage said nothing to this, but sat there erect and dignified, the slow painful tears of middle age rolling incongruously down her worldly cheeks. Imogen had lost the habit of affectionate caresses, nor could she find anything truthful to say which would console her mother, whose responsibility for her marriage she now regarded as not small; so she remained silent and motionless, and made no demonstration of sympathy. At length Mrs. Armitage ceased to weep; and opening the little bag in which she kept her aids to beauty, she removed the traces of her tears with that calm absence of concealment which seemed to the Thornton family so particularly insulting.

"Imogen," she observed in a quivering voice as she

completed this operation, "never have ambitions for your children."

Imogen again found nothing to say. Mrs. Armitage gazed steadily into the fire for a few minutes, and then began to talk, in her normal voice, of Richard's proposed new winter coat. Imogen replied with the same casual air, and the subject still occupied them when the gong summoned them to lunch.

"I'll just run you over to Royd Bank now," said Imogen at the conclusion of this meal.

"But will you have time, dear?" demurred Mrs. Armitage, mindful of the bazaar.

"Oh, ample," replied Imogen carelessly, without looking at her watch.

On her return from Royd Bank some forty minutes later she saw that Brearley must be in the house already, for Newsome (the chauffeur) was standing in front of the Hall entrance beside the large car which was his special charge; and as she drew up and descended he came near and informed her that he had brought Mr. Thornton back half an hour ago. It was a hint that she was late, and Imogen felt irritated; she dawdled perversely up the steps and paused in the hall to see whether the afternoon post had brought any letters for her. It had apparently brought two; the larger of them contained the proofs of yesterday's wedding photographs, the other was unmistakably from Miriam Hoad. With a sigh Imogen opened it, expecting to find a note of haughty thanks for the cheque she had despatched a few days ago.

The envelope contained, however, nothing but the cheque itself.

Imogen turned it over in surprise, wondering that there was no note to explain its return; at first she thought she had omitted some formality in drawing it, so that it had been returned for correction, but she found that this was not the

case. She stood a moment in thought. Had Miriam's pride at last revolted at the gift? Or had returning health made it unnecessary? The latter seemed impossible, the former perhaps more likely; but surely in either case Miriam would have written some explanatory word. She might have written, of course, and forgotten to enclose the note, but this was so utterly opposed to everything Imogen knew of Miriam that she could not credit it. In perplexity she glanced down again at her own bold signature; the surname reminded her of Brearley, and in a flash of insight she guessed both why the cheque had been returned and who it was Mrs. Armitage had seen with Brearley at the theatre. Brearley's companion had been Ivy Hoad. The remembrance of Ivy's slim youthful prettiness, her ash-coloured hair and milk-and-rose complexion, her round white arms and pert childish face, suddenly roused in Imogen a fury of resentment. In extreme anger she flew across the hall to the library door and flung it wide. Her husband was standing by the hearth looking very spruce, with a flower in his coat; his silk hat and gloves stood on the table before him.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he threw out in the sarcastic tone he usually employed to his wife nowadays. "Are you ready to start? You're not more than a quarter of an hour late, for once."

"No, I'm not ready to start," replied Imogen violently, with an angry flash of her dark eyes. She closed the door behind her. "I came to ask you to do something to please me."

"Can I do anything to please you nowadays?" enquired Brearley with a provokingly mild air, as if he really wanted to know.

"Oh, it's very simple and well within your capacity," said his wife with angry scorn. "It's merely this—if you must go about with Ivy Hoad, please try to keep from

places where you're likely to be seen by mother, because it distresses her."

Brearley coloured to the roots of his hair.

"What do you know about Ivy Hoad?" he demanded thickly.

Imogen shrugged her shoulders. "Oh—enough," she said.

"She's a damned sight pleasanter to be with than you are, at any rate," burst out Brearley, losing his temper.

"If you don't wish me to remain your wife, pray let us separate," cried Imogen in anger. "I assure you I shan't make difficulties. But while I am still your wife, I think you might observe the conventions so far as to be at least outwardly faithful to me. All this Ivy Hoad kind of thing is very undignified, and puts me into a most ridiculous position."

"It's all very well, talking like that," shouted Brearley with indignation. "Wife, indeed! Much of a wife you are to me. And if I do go about with"—he hesitated, sniffed, and finally brought out—"Ivy, I'm no worse than you."

"No worse than me?" queried Imogen in cold astonishment. "*I* haven't broken my marriage vows."

"Very likely not," conceded Brearley with an attempt at an ironical tone. "But what about before your marriage, eh? What about that Johnnie Talland of yours?"

"I'm not responsible to you for what I did before my marriage," Imogen told him.

"Oh, you aren't? You think not, eh?" cried Brearley furiously. "It rather depends how far you went, doesn't it? Tell me that."

"Don't be disgusting," said Imogen with contempt.

"It's all very well being so high and mighty about it," persisted her husband, his voice rising angrily. "But I know better! Your Talland told me about it himself. What do you think of that, eh?"

"I think you're making it up to annoy me," scoffed Imogen, almost smiling at the childish weakness of his invention.

"I'm not!" shouted Brearley, enraged. "He told me himself, in my own office down at the mill, that he'd got a girl into trouble and wanted the money for her. He exaggerated, I suppose, like that kind of fellow always does. Of course I didn't know it was *you*—I never thought of such a thing till you let on about him that Sunday afternoon in the garden. And even then I didn't; it never struck me, and I believed in you, Imogen, until you began bothering me about Luke and making my life hell."

"Don't be ridiculous, Brearley," said Imogen more kindly —his mistake was pathetically absurd. "You're talking absolute nonsense, you know you are."

"It's not nonsense!" shouted Brearley, bringing his clenched fist down on the table. "I tell you he told me himself. You think I'm a fool, Imogen, but I can put two and two together as well as anybody. Didn't you ask me once whether that was how I refused Johnnie Talland? Didn't you accuse me once, that time when I gave in about Luke, of sins against charity, or some tomfool remark like that? You knew young Talland had asked me for money, and *I* know what he wanted it for, and so I know what to think of you."

"It's a lie," said Imogen contemptuously. "You know you don't believe that about me, so don't pretend you do."

"I do, Imogen!" cried Brearley in exasperation. "How else do you account for knowing all about him asking me for money? Don't pretend that Luke told you, for he didn't know; I took the trouble to find out *that,* that night we had the row about Harriet."

"It was you, you yourself, who told me that you had refused Johnnie," Imogen told him. "I knew somebody had refused him; and I knew the words in which they did it,

for they became a sort of nightmare to him; and when you began to refuse poor Harriet her Bayreuth trip, in exactly those very words, I guessed it was you who refused Johnnie. And you didn't deny it, you know."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Brearley sulkily, unable to follow this complicated argument.

"You knew all about Johnnie's friendship with me from the inquest after his death," pursued Imogen.

"I never heard a word about it!" her husband contradicted her peevishly. "You were never mentioned at the inquest."

"Not?" queried Imogen in extreme surprise. She added unbelievingly: "You've forgotten."

"I have not!" shouted Brearley, maddened. "Don't talk to me as though I were a child, Imogen. I've never heard you mentioned in connection with Johnnie Talland—I know what to think, all the same," he concluded in a mutter.

"But everybody knew about it," protested Imogen. "Why, the very first time you saw me I was with him."

"I thought he was Luke's friend," muttered her husband. "You never said a word to me about him."

"Yes, I did," said Imogen. "The night you first came to Royd Bank."

Brearley sniffed. "I hadn't sense to take in anything that night," he said in an accusing tone, as though it had been Imogen's fault.

"I don't deny that I loved Johnnie," pursued Imogen, desiring to be perfectly candid.

"Oh, don't you?" cried Brearley, infuriated. "You've a nerve, Imogen, to stand there telling me that."

"But as for anything else, that's perfectly absurd, and you know it," concluded his wife proudly.

Brearley flung himself about, scowled, muttered, and threw out angry exclamations; but in spite of himself he

was convinced—Imogen's long-established habit of supremacy told. "Well, it was some other girl, then, I suppose," he admitted at length in a tone of childish irritation. "I wish I'd known before, that's all; it's spoiled everything for me lately."

"But don't you understand," explained Imogen, irritated by his inability to draw a logical conclusion, "he didn't ask you for money for a girl—there was no girl."

"I tell you there was a girl," persisted Brearley obstinately. "Now I come to think of it," he added with a reminiscent air, "I remember he did tell me she lived somewhere down in the Midlands; but when I thought I'd found it was you, I thought he'd lied to keep you out of it, you know."

"It's not true—there was no other girl," repeated Imogen, turning white at this piece of circumstantial evidence.

"Have it your own way," said Brearley with a kind of sardonic cheerfulness. "You always think you know better than anybody else, Imogen—I'm used to that nowadays. But it is true. He was sent away from that place in the Midlands, you know, and Mr. Talland wrote to me and asked me to get him a job here. He didn't tell me exactly what his son had done to be sent away, but he talked about a second chance, and all that sort of thing. And at the inquest he as good as told me the lad's suicide was due to remorse for some moral delinquency. That's what he said: moral delinquency."

Imogen gave a sharp cry.

"So you see," concluded Brearley triumphantly, "your Johnnie Talland wasn't such a hero of chivalry as all that."

"I suppose you think you *are* a hero of chivalry with Ivy?" cried Imogen from the depths of her suffering.

"That's rich from you, Imogen!" said Brearley with deep feeling. "Yes, it's rich; by God it is! Who asked me

to take her into the office, I should like to know? Do you suppose I want to go on in a low-down way like that? It's you who've driven me to it; I haven't a bit of pleasure in my own house nowadays." Just then the clock struck. "Will you go and get *dressed?*" he roared, striking the table again with his hand. "Upon my word it would be worth a divorce to live with a woman who was punctual."

Imogen fled to her room. Mechanically she obeyed Brearley and changed her frock, though she trembled from head to foot as she did so, and had hardly strength to raise her hands above her head. Her mind was in a tumult; she had moments of wild despair when she thought that Brearley's odious tale was true, and Johnnie's memory for ever blackened; then hope revived again, and she clung to the notion that her husband had mixed up Johnnie's story with that of some other young man—he was perfectly capable of such a piece of stupidity; she had heard him make similar blunders many times before. But hardly on a matter of such importance to himself as he imagined this to be, she reflected; and a moan of pain escaped from her pale lips. Brearley undoubtedly believed in his own story. He had said "in the Midlands," but it was quite possible that he had unconsciously invented that after connecting Johnnie with the tale. There were hosts of questions which she wanted to ask him about the affair; she wanted to know more about that last interview between Brearley and Johnnie, and especially she wanted to know how Johnnie had accounted for the disappearance of Brearley's previous loan. She made up her mind to ask Brearley now, as they drove together into Hudley, some of these questions which burned in her mind; she could not rest till she had discovered finally what she was to think of Johnnie and his love. As she crept down the stairs, clinging to the balustrade for support, she wondered ironically

whether most couples who appeared slightly late at bazaars, smiling artificial smiles, had had before starting the kind of scene which had just passed between herself and her husband. She paused at the foot of the stairs to steady herself and assume her public manner, then walked with head held high across the hall to the entrance, where Brearley was already standing, talking to Newsome, who was consulting his watch. When she appeared her husband said "At last!" in a tone of ferocious impatience, and climbed into the front of the car.

"Aren't you going to sit behind with me?" enquired Imogen, anxious to begin her questions.

"With you? No," replied Brearley with brutal directness —her taunt about Ivy was evidently rankling in his breast. He slipped along the seat into the driver's place, while Newsome held open the door into the body of the car for Imogen.

"Isn't Newsome going to drive?" cried Imogen, hanging back in dismay.

"No, he isn't," said her husband shortly, hardened in his whim by his wife's opposition. "I'm going to drive. For heaven's sake get in, Imogen, and don't waste any more time."

"Won't it look rather odd, your driving?" demurred his wife, glancing at his top hat and flower.

"I suppose I can do what I like in my own car?" demanded Brearley savagely, starting the engine.

Imogen felt that if her nerves were subjected to the ordeal of Brearley's driving, on the top of what she already had to endure, she would probably reach Hudley in hysterics. Moreover, she considered that after the unpleasant scene they had just had the excitable Brearley was not in a fit state to drive—if, indeed, he ever was—for his face had a heavy flush and his eyes were bloodshot.

"You know it makes me nervous when you drive," she protested weakly.

"Walk, then!" shouted Brearley at the top of his voice, his face crimson with rage.

He leaned over and slammed the door in her face, then, turning back, put in the clutch. The car leaped forward with a jerk. Newsome, exclaiming, jumped on to the footboard and managed to attain his seat. The car swept rapidly down the drive and out between the open gates. Imogen, left behind, stood stupidly on the gravel for a few moments, waiting for it to return. Brearley would surely repent, or Newsome bring him to his senses. But it did not come, and presently she heard the sound of the horn as the car turned into the main Hudley road. Then she went indoors, her cheeks burning, and dragged herself wearily upstairs to her room.

On the bed where she had cast them lay the proofs of Luke's wedding photographs; mechanically—she was really stupefied by the open insult Brearley had put upon her—she took them up and looked at them, and even found a smile for her brother's stiff and disapproving attitude. Her own likeness rather startled her, and she held it at arm's length to get it into better focus—with little satisfaction in the result. The whim seized her to compare it with the famous "far-away" portrait, a copy of which still stood on the table in her husband's dressing-room. She unlocked the door and went in, and putting the two photographs together, surveyed the more recent one with even less satisfaction than before. The earlier one was the portrait of a lovely soft-hearted girl, the other that of a handsome woman with a temper of her own. She flew to the mirror, and found that the second photograph did not bely her; she was still beautiful, but the curve of her cheek had hardened, pride and obstinacy were written in the lines of her mouth, and her

dark eyes wore an expression of haughty disillusion. Her resemblance to Mrs. Armitage was much more strongly marked than in the earlier picture.

Murmuring: "It's no wonder he prefers Ivy Hoad," she crouched down upon the floor and broke into a passion of weeping.

When at last she regained her self-control she felt that her youth was over. Even as she wept she had gone over in her mind all the details of those few brief months with Johnnie, and she decided that Brearley's story was almost certainly true. It explained so many things about poor Johnnie; his reluctance to tell Luke or Mrs. Armitage or anyone of their love; his reluctance for any communication about money with his father; his money troubles themselves —the letter! Imogen remembered that ill-written Loughmore letter well. Brearley's story explained that letter, and it explained also Johnnie's suicide. Almost certainly it was true. Imogen looked back at Johnnie across the years, and decided that yes, it certainly was true. Her last illusion was gone, and Imogen felt that she was old, old enough to have lost the fiery intolerance of youth, old enough to resign herself to the inevitable and accept what was instead of striving for what might be, old enough to forgive Johnnie and to feel sorry for her husband. She rose, stiff with her long discomfort on the draughty floor, and replaced the photograph on his table; she then removed the traces of her tears, changed her frock for one which Brearley admired, and went downstairs into the library.

A tray with a decanter, a siphon and a used glass stood on the table. Imogen sighed, for such a tray was usually to be found nowadays in any room which Brearley had occupied for more than half an hour. The hearth, too, was littered with cigar ash. Imogen swept it up herself, experiencing a certain pleasure in this homely act. She remained on her

knees in front of the fire, gazing thoughtfully into its glowing heart; and decided that now, indeed, she had an opportunity for displaying heroism of a kind poor Miriam Hoad would admire. Unfortunately poor Miriam would never, she was sure, take help from her again, but she must try to see what else could be done for her—later. The first thing to do was to regain Brearley's affection; sheer feminine vanity, if nothing else, dictated that she should reclaim him from that little minx Ivy. Divorce, indeed! Ivy was very much mistaken if she thought she was going to push things as far as that. Imogen smiled to herself as she thought how easily she could reclaim Brearley. He would return from the bazaar annoyed with himself for his really rude behaviour in leaving her behind, and expecting her to reprove him fiercely for it. Instead, she would be soft and lovable; she would admit that she had been to blame in many ways lately, would clear up further, if necessary, his really absurd misunderstanding about Johnnie, and end by weeping on his shoulder and saying that she had been very unhappy the last two or three years. That very night they should be reconciled, and in a week she would make him forget both the decanter and the very name of Ivy Hoad. She could do it—certainly she could do it. She sprang to her feet with a renewed zest for the life—second-best, of course, but still not wholly unendurable—which the fates allowed her; and rang the bell for tea.

There was a long delay before her summons was answered; in spite of her good resolutions Imogen began to feel impatient, and pulled the old-fashioned bell a second time with considerable force. The maid who at length appeared had a white face.

"Did you not hear the bell?" demanded Imogen, making an effort to be mild.

The girl replied that she had been answering the telephone.

"Was there a message for me? You should have fetched me," said Imogen in some annoyance, fearing that Brearley had rung up to say he should not be home till late.

The girl said, stammering, that it was not exactly a message for her.

"They say there's been an accident on the hill," she explained, avoiding Imogen's glance.

"An accident?" cried Imogen. Her heart stood still as she took in the implications of the message. The accident must have occurred to the Thornton car, or there was no reason why Roebuck Hall should receive the news. She remembered with despair that Brearley was driving. "Is the master hurt?" she demanded breathlessly. She read the answer in the girl's face, paused a moment, and then asked from dry lips: "Is he killed?"

The girl burst into frightened sobs and nodded.

II

Newsome's evidence at the inquest was a model of discretion. He did not say that Mr. Thornton had had a violent quarrel with his wife before he left home, so that he was much agitated—the official explanation of Imogen's absence from the car was indisposition. He did not say that they were very late for their appointment, so that Mr. Thornton was driving rapidly to make up for lost time; and he did not dwell upon Brearley's reputation in the village as a driver who took the middle of the road by preference, liked to go quickly, often forgot to sound his horn when he rounded corners until he saw another car bearing down upon him, and handled his wheel so that the track of the car's wheels was exceedingly devious. He merely stated that as they were going down the hill on the main road from High Roebuck to Hudley, the surface being slippery with the rain, they turned the well-known corner and came upon a small child skipping gaily in the road in front of the car. Horrified, Mr. Thornton gave a violent jerk at the wheel to avoid her; the car skidded across the road, struck the wall and turned turtle. Newsome himself was thrown out at the moment of impact, breaking his collar-bone in the process, and the child was knocked down by the back wheels and received serious injuries to her leg, while Mr. Thornton was buried beneath the ruins of the car, and could not at first be extricated. However, the road was a fairly busy one, and medical and other assistance was soon on the spot; an ambulance was telephoned for, and all three were conveyed to the Hudley Infirmary. He opined, however, that Mr.

Thornton was dead before he got there, and this was confirmed by the medical evidence. Asked whether the horn had been sounded on turning the corner, Newsome hesitated and then said that he thought so. Other witnesses, notably the child's father, a postman who was off duty after his three-o'clock round and smoking at the door of his house at the time, were not so lenient to Brearley. The postman said definitely that he heard no horn, and that the car came round the corner at a tremendous pace, swaying violently about the road. Privately he added that Mr. Thornton looked as though he were either mad or had been drinking. Brearley was, however, no doubt partly because his life was lost, and censure could help nobody, exonerated from blame.

In the late afternoon of the day of the inquest Brearley's body was brought to his own home in readiness for the funeral, which was to take place on the morrow. Imogen, much moved, superintended the placing of flowers about the open coffin, and then, dismissing everyone from the darkened room, sat down beside her husband, whom she now saw for the first time since his death. Her grief for him was not wild and unrestrained, like Mrs. Thornton's, but it was none the less strong and sincere, and as she stooped over him to put a kiss on his cold lips she felt for him a yearning maternal love which nearly broke her heart. She felt so intensely sorry for the poor boy, as her husband seemed to her now, that she thought she would never get over it. Poor Brearley! She was sorry for his wretched end; for since she had heard the story she had followed him many times in imagination through that fatal drive down Roebuck Hill, and she understood so well the desperate, frightened jerk he had given the wheel at the sight of the child's danger that she could never think of it without tears. But she was more sorry still for the wretched quarrel that had preceded it, and the wretched years which had led to that. How had they, decent, well-

meaning people both, ever come to such a scene as that, she asked herself in deep bewildered sadness. Now that he was gone and she had not to witness his failings, her husband seemed to her such a simple friendly soul that she could not understand how she had ever brought herself to say unkind things to him.

She recalled his courtship and their early married life, and her tears fell thick and fast; she had liked him well enough then, and there was nothing he would not do for her. His love for her had been, she saw it now, simply the finest and most spiritual thing in his life; and she had ruined him. Her husband's face wore now that dignity which death confers; and she told herself that he had had splendid latent qualities, which only needed to be brought out and strengthened to make him a fine and admirable man. She could have brought those qualities out if she had been so minded—in the first years of their life together she *had* brought them out, and everyone had noticed the improvement in him. Her sense of guilt was overwhelming as she dwelt on the sordid misery of their last few years. And how easily it could all have been put right if only Brearley were still alive! If his body, which now lay before her cold and lifeless, had been warm and breathing, if he could have heard her voice and felt her touch and seen her eyes and smile, everything would have been well between them soon enough. If he had been severely injured instead of killed, all would yet have been well, for Brearley had always turned to her like a child to its mother when he was ill or worried or sad. But he was irretrievably gone. She wanted to pour out a passion of tenderness upon him, soothe and console him, convince him that he had done his utmost to avoid the child, and that the accident was not his fault; tell him that she, Imogen, really loved him and that these last few years were all a stupid blunder which they would soon forget in the happier years

to come. But he was irrevocably gone, and she had lost for ever a man who had loved her better than anyone else ever had—better than Luke, than Mrs. Armitage, than Miriam Hoad, even than Johnnie. Just now Imogen's memories of Johnnie were swamped, obliterated, by those of her husband; whether the tale about the Midland girl were true or not—Imogen gave it a mere fleeting thought—all Johnnie's boyish love-making seemed somehow mere moonshine beside the solid facts of her married life. She felt that if only Brearley could come suddenly bounding into the room, as he used to do, calling her name in loud Yorkshire tones and bending his warm, jovial face over hers to kiss her, she would be perfectly happy. Indeed, she was sick with longing for him to do so; the longing to see him again, to hear him utter, with his jolly laugh, one of his wonted cheerful imbecilities about her beauty, was like a grievous bodily ache which could never, now, be assuaged.

Then she remembered that for the last few years Brearley's imbecilities had not been cheerful, and that he had kept his laugh for the hearing of others than herself, and the shame of her failure overwhelmed her again. Weeping, she cast herself upon his body, winding round his neck those arms whose white curves he had never failed to admire, and laying her head upon his unresponsive shoulder. Her passion of tears was at its height when the door was flung violently open and Mrs. Thornton flounced into the room, Harriet, pale and protesting, appearing behind her.

"You do well to cry, Imogen!" almost screamed her mother-in-law.

The sorrow at Brearley's death had been widespread and sincere, Mrs. Armitage, who, of course, had come to Roebuck Hall to be with her widowed daughter, alone appearing unaffected, for she thought that the accident had saved a divorce suit. Mrs. Thornton's wild hysterical grief had

almost unseated her reason. Harriet, who with her husband had been hastily recalled from their brief honeymoon, and was staying with her mother at the Dene, was quite ill with grief for her brother; somewhat to Imogen's surprise Richard was also very much upset, cried bitterly and refused his food, while even Luke seemed sorry and subdued, though this might be due to his spoilt honeymoon rather than to grief for his brother-in-law. Brearley's workmen and the people in the village, though much sympathy was felt among them for the postman, and Brearley's faults were by no means unknown to them, also expressed a real regret. Unfortunately this regret took the form of throwing the blame for the whole affair on Imogen; the quarrel which Newsome had omitted to mention at the inquest was known all over the village through the medium of the Roebuck Hall servants, and was discussed there in all its bearings, some people even going so far as to say that Mr. Thornton had driven his car into the wall on purpose, his life being worthless to him on account of his misery with his wife. This gossip, released from all restraint now that the inquest was safely over and Brearley exonerated from blame, had that afternoon reached the ears of Mrs. Thornton, chiefly through Harriet's timid efforts to keep it from her. Mrs. Thornton was already deeply hurt and alienated by Imogen's absence from her husband's side at the time of the accident. Hitherto, though she had abounded in vague outcries, she had managed to refrain from any specific accusation on this point against Imogen, feeling herself that her irritation was unreasonable; but now, beside herself with rage and grief, she rushed across to Roebuck Hall to tax her daughter-in-law with this fatal quarrel, which acquired the more significance in her eyes because it had previously been concealed from her. She entered the house crying out loudly for Imogen, and was directed by the servants—Mrs. Armitage

was upstairs at the time, soothing Richard—to the room where her son lay. She was not mollified by the sight of her daughter-in-law kneeling beside the low table on which Brearley's coffin had been disposed, for she felt that Imogen had usurped her own rightful place.

"You do well to cry, Imogen," she repeated shrilly. "Leave me alone, Harriet; I shall say what I like."

Imogen rose and came towards her. She was hurt by this intrusion on her private grief, but no one had a better right in that room than Brearley's mother, and Imogen felt her sadness redoubled in her presence. Mrs. Thornton's hair had gone grey with her sorrow; her comely face was drawn and pinched, her eyes were red with weeping, her black draperies hung in careless disarray, and about her whole person there was an air of wildness and hysteria. On an impulse of loving sympathy, Imogen took her in her arms and kissed her cheek. Mrs. Thornton, however, struggled to extricate herself, exclaiming: "Let me go, you wicked girl!"

Astonished, Imogen released her and fell back.

"What's this I hear about a quarrel?" demanded Mrs. Thornton wildly.

She had spoken at the top of her voice, and on a natural impulse Imogen said "Hush!"

"But I won't hush!" screamed Mrs. Thornton, advancing on her with a threatening air. "I want to know what it was you said to my poor boy that sent him out like that to his death. It's all your fault—if it hadn't been for you he'd have been alive to-day. And I'm sure you had nothing to complain of against him—nobody could have been a better husband to you than Brearley." For a moment she gave way to hysterical grief, murmuring between her sobs that Brearley had done everything for Imogen, everything; then she commanded herself so far as to ask fiercely: "What were you quarrelling about? I insist on knowing; I insist!"

Turning away to the coffin she added in a tone of tender fondness: "My darling!" and laid a hand on Brearley's head.

Between pity and anger Imogen did not know what to say. She had no wish to speak the name of Ivy Hoad, especially while Mrs. Thornton hung over her son's body, but she could think of nothing else to say. The whole scene was so inexpressibly painful to her that what she eventually brought out was a request that Mrs. Thornton would come with her to another room, where she would explain everything.

"You can explain it just as well here," said Mrs. Thornton in a tone of command. Imogen shook her head. "It's because you daren't explain it in Brearley's presence," cried her mother-in-law, turning savagely on her. "You daren't lie to me here, that's why." As Imogen remained silent Mrs. Thornton suddenly shrieked out at her: "It was that young Talland." In spite of herself Imogen winced. "*I* know what Brearley thought about you and him," continued her mother-in-law relentlessly. "He's hinted it to me many a time lately. You needn't try to deceive me, Imogen. You can't deny that it was him you quarrelled about."

Before she spoke Imogen reminded herself that Mrs. Thornton was feeling towards her as she herself would feel towards somebody whom she suspected of ill-treating Richard and causing his death. This steadied her and enabled her to speak with courtesy and compassion. She thought that the truth was Mrs. Thornton's due; so she admitted frankly to her mother-in-law that part of her quarrel with Brearley had, as she imagined, been about Johnnie Talland. Brearley had had, she said, a quite absurd notion on this point, and she would always be thankful to remember that before he left the house she had disabused him of it. Her statement was truthful, dignified, and convincing, and the trembling Harriet,

who leant against the door pale and speechless with emotion, believed it in its entirety. Mrs. Thornton, however, was not in a condition of mind to believe anything.

"You needn't tell me that," she cried with contemptuous incredulity when Imogen repeated that she had convinced Brearley of his mistake. "I know what to think." A tinge of triumph crept into her voice as she continued rapidly: "It's what I always said; I knew how it would turn out from the first. I begged and implored Brearley at the time not to marry you; I told him you'd never make him happy. And you never have; you've never tried to make him comfortable from the first. You're a wicked girl, Imogen Armitage, and I wish Brearley'd never seen you." Her voice broke, and she dissolved again into tears, but she drew herself together to add with a theatrical assumption of dignity which jarred on both her hearers: "Perhaps you'll leave me alone now with my son."

Imogen made a slight movement of her shoulders and withdrew. In the hall she found that she was trembling so that she could scarcely stand; the thought that she had been wrangling with her mother-in-law over her husband's dead body made her feel physically sick, and she asked herself again how she had come to that. For consolation she sought the nursery. Richard, who was leaning against his grandmother's knee looking rather listlessly at a book of pictures, ran to his mother as soon as she opened the door. Imogen sat down by the hearth, and taking the child on her knee so that his head lay against her shoulder, rested her cheek against his soft dark hair and held him to her breast. Richard was still feeling subdued and miserable, so he submitted quietly to this enforced inaction. Mrs. Armitage saw that her daughter was troubled, and said nothing for a while. Presently, however, she asked quietly:

"Don't you expect Mrs. Thornton this afternoon?"

"She's here already—downstairs," replied Imogen, mechanically straightening Richard's socks with her free hand.

"Ought you not to go down to her?" suggested Mrs. Armitage.

"No," said Imogen.

"Shall I go?" pursued Mrs. Armitage.

"Oh no, no!" said Imogen wearily. "What's the use? It would only mean another scene. She accuses me of every imaginable crime."

Mrs. Armitage looked distressed and puzzled, but gave a significant glance at the child to remind Imogen that these matters should not be discussed in front of him, and was silent. Imogen, too, said nothing more, but sat in an attitude of deep dejection, gazing into the fire over Richard's head. After a long while there floated up to their ears sounds of a door opening and closing, and then sudden loud weeping mingled with Harriet's nervous uneven tones.

"That's Granny," observed Richard with his imperfect articulation, raising his head.

He wrinkled up his nose distastefully.

This grimace expressed so perfectly his attitude to Mrs. Thornton that his other grandmother with difficulty subdued a smile. Richard caught the gleam of it and smiled too. But on Imogen the grimace had a different effect, for it was characteristically Brearley's, and as the child made it he resembled his father so strongly that her heart ached, and she felt she understood Mrs. Thornton's desperate grief.

"Poor Granny!" she said in a broken tone, as the front door closed and the sounds died away. "She's sorry about father."

Richard promptly lifted up his voice and wept.

"Really, Imogen!" said Mrs. Armitage with considerable annoyance. "The child has cried enough to-day; pray leave him alone."

She took Richard on to her own knee and showed him pictures till his heart was again at rest.

Later in the evening, when he was in bed, she demanded from her daughter an account of what had passed between her and Mrs. Thornton that afternoon. Imogen briefly gave it. Mrs. Armitage arched her eyebrows at the recital, but made no comment, merely saying at its conclusion that it was a good thing Imogen would be comfortably provided for.

"You'll be Richard's legal guardian, too," she observed with satisfaction. "Do you intend to stay at Roebuck Hall?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Imogen wearily. "I haven't thought about the future at all." Her voice shook slightly as she added: "I'm too busy with the past."

Mrs. Armitage gave a sympathetic murmur—which Imogen felt to be insincere—and said no more; and her daughter continued her silent brooding reverie.

She was roused from this by the entrance of Luke. Between Mrs. Thornton's hysterics and Harriet's only less wild grief Imogen suspected that Luke was having a difficult time at Roebuck Dene, and she was sorry for him. The spoiling of his honeymoon must have been a very severe disappointment; moreover, all the legal and business details of the affair—and there seemed to be many—fell upon him as Imogen's brother and Mrs. Thornton's son-in-law. Luke seemed fated to be concerned with inquests, reflected Imogen sadly. To-night he looked particularly harassed and uncomfortable, and Imogen greeted him sympathetically. When she heard his errand, however, she was extremely angry, and her sympathy both for him and for her mother-in-law was turned to bitterness; for he had come to beg her not to attend the funeral on the morrow—Mrs. Thornton had declared that if Imogen went she would not, and Luke urged his sister to humour the elder woman's whim and stay away. Speaking rapidly and with unusual fire, Imogen

declined to do anything of the sort. Luke then proposed that no ladies should attend the funeral at all, and Mrs. Armitage advised her daughter to accept this compromise. Imogen, however, said emphatically that she was Brearley's wife and did not intend to desert him in that way; she had a right to be present at his funeral and she should exercise that right. She added rather contemptuously—for she was annoyed with herself for having wasted sympathy on a woman who treated her so—that her brother need not be troubled, for he would find that Mrs. Thornton would not stay away from her son's funeral under any circumstances whatever. With this cold comfort Luke finally had to be content, and he went away angry and dissatisfied.

Imogen's forecast proved correct, and both Brearley's mother and his wife were present at his funeral. This did not, however, indicate any approach to a reconciliation between them; on the contrary, it had the effect of making their lack of harmony public.

Mrs. Thornton had declined to go to Roebuck Hall and proceed thence to the church with the rest of the party, though she had allowed Harriet to do so; she arrived alone when the service had begun. It was a day of persistent rain, and Mrs. Thornton swept up the aisle carrying a damp umbrella; the implication being, Imogen supposed, that she could not bring herself to accept even a drive of three minutes from her daughter-in-law. Mrs. Thornton glanced once at Imogen, tossed her head and then seated herself as far away from her son's widow as the small building permitted. In order to do this, she positively pushed into a remote side pew occupied by mere spectators from the village, so that her insulting intention was sufficiently obvious, and gave rise to a flutter of dismay amongst both spectators and guests. Worse, however, was to come.

When the brief service was over and the mournful proces-

sion to the graveside began to form in the porch Imogen looked about for her mother-in-law, but could not see her; she paused as long as decency permitted, and then resigning herself to Mrs. Thornton's absence followed the coffin through the dreary autumn rain, leading Richard by the hand. They reached the open grave and grouped themselves about it; the vicar, who had so recently married Luke and Harriet and graced the wedding banquet with his jovial smile, began to pronounce the most solemn words of the burial service, and Imogen, putting aside all other thoughts, tried to give her mind and heart wholly to Brearley in this sad hour. It was not her habit to weep in public, but she was much moved, and her sorrow was sincere. Suddenly she was violently elbowed aside; the attack was so unexpected that she staggered, slipped on the wet planks and lost her footing; if Luke, who was standing behind her, had not seized her arm in a firm grip she would have fallen into the open grave. She turned in astonishment to see who this rude newcomer might be, and found herself gazing into Mrs. Thornton's flushed face, which wore an expression of mingled grief and malice. Imogen made a slight gesture of resignation and stepped back to allow her mother-in-law to gaze into the grave. Mrs. Thornton took her place with an air of triumph, and seizing Richard by the hand, dragged him forcibly to her side. Richard, of course, cried, panic-stricken, and stretched out his free hand piteously to his mother, who quietly drew him back to her.

The vicar read on, his colour slightly heightened by this untoward occurrence; earth rattled upon the coffin lid, and the ceremony was over. Mrs. Thornton turned away with a haste which was noticeable, and her relations gradually followed her, but Imogen lingered sadly by the grave, loth to leave poor Brearley thus alone, and Mrs. Armitage waited for her at a discreet distance. When at last Imogen made up

her mind, with a sigh, to turn from death to life, and walked slowly with Richard and her mother to the church gate, she found that all but one of the cars comprising the funeral *cortège* had moved away, and no one of the funeral party remained but Luke. Imogen, whose thoughts were with her husband, did not at first see anything peculiar in this situation, but Mrs. Armitage exclaimed, and turned for an explanation to her son, who stood before them flushed with conflicting emotions. Luke told her in a rapid undertone that Mrs. Thornton had determined to entertain the funeral guests at her own house, and had given orders to the undertaker to that effect.

"Do you mean they're not coming to the Hall?" asked Imogen, hearing this. She read the answer in Luke's face, and said: "Oh, we are to go there, then?"

Luke shook his head.

"We're *not* to go?" said Imogen, really bewildered.

"Harriet quite agrees that I shall come with you," evaded Luke, whose position at that moment was not enviable.

"There's no necessity for that," said Imogen proudly, understanding the situation at last. "Your place is with your wife, Luke; pray join her."

"We needn't stand here to argue about that," said Luke irritably, calling her attention to the dispersing crowd of spectators, who were casting interested glances in their direction.

At this Mrs. Armitage, her fine face set and angry, climbed rapidly into the car, and the others followed, Luke lifting Richard in carefully. During the short drive to the house Mrs. Armitage, whose sense of decency and propriety was really outraged, gave vent in unmeasured terms to her disapproval of Mrs. Thornton's behaviour; she said that no one but a low and vulgar woman would have made such a scene as that at the graveside, or created such an absurd and

humiliating situation as the present one. It was exasperating, absurd, intolerable; in fact, exactly what one might expect from such a woman as Mrs. Thornton. Imogen rather sharply bade her remember that Richard was there; indeed the child, his heavy mouth hanging open, was watching his grandmother's angry face with fascinated attention, and listening to what she said with all his ears. Mrs. Armitage, seeing this, desisted; but as soon as they had reached Roebuck Hall and Richard had been packed off to the nursery she resumed her tirade, now including Brearley and Harriet in her wholesale condemnation of the Thorntons. Neither Luke nor Imogen cared to listen to this, and they turned away together. Mrs. Armitage's voice followed them, bidding Luke go to the luncheon at Roebuck Dene and hint to the guests that Imogen was too indisposed to attend. An expression of distaste crossed Luke's face at this, but he shrugged his shoulders and prepared to obey.

"All this comes very hard on you, Luke," said Imogen, walking beside him to the door.

"I won't deny I shall be thankful when it's all over and Harriet and I can get away to our own home," admitted Luke. "But I'm troubled about you, Imogen. What possessed you to mention Johnnie to Mrs. Thornton? It was madness. Mrs. Thornton has always been very good to me, and I don't wish to say anything against her, but really her nature isn't suitable for such confidences."

"I thought I ought to tell her the truth when she asked for it," said Imogen in a tone of weary dejection.

"Unfortunately she doesn't think it's the truth," observed Luke dryly. "She says the most odious things about you, Imogen, and nothing I can urge has the slightest effect on her. Harriet is terribly upset. It's a wretched business altogether."

"I'm very sorry," said Imogen. She tried to keep her voice

gentle and affectionate, but found her brother's critical tone hard to bear. "Please give my love to Harriet and tell her not to worry."

Luke sighed, and moved away. At the bottom of the steps he turned to say good-bye; his face was already brighter with the prospect of rejoining Harriet soon, and Imogen found this inexpressibly bitter.

"Are you sure you don't wish me to stay here with you?" demanded Luke. "I'll stay if you wish it, Imogen."

"No, no—it's useless," replied his sister, not mollified by this belated consideration. "You must hurry, Luke; Harriet will miss you."

Luke still hesitated, but after a moment, remarking apologetically: "There are one or two things I want to see young Hesketh about—it's been such a rush before that I haven't had time," he put on his funereal silk hat and went away to his wife.

Imogen, turning into the house, curtly bade the maids serve a meal to Mrs. Armitage and clear away the rest of the luncheon which had been prepared for the expected guests. Feeling the humiliation of this command suddenly as more than she could bear, she refused all refreshment herself, and going upstairs to her room, threw herself down dejectedly upon her bed. Mindful of the solemnity of the day, she tried to think of Brearley as she had done on the previous afternoon when she sat beside him, but it was impossible; his image was obscured by Mrs. Thornton's. Those of his traits which came into her mind were the ones which he had shared with his mother, and which she had always disliked, and the incidents she remembered in which he had played a part all showed him as either ridiculous or disagreeable. She could feel no sorrow for his loss, no regret for her present relations with his mother; indeed, she was conscious of no emotion at all but an irritable despondency of which she was ashamed.

She told herself that she was tired, dead tired, utterly worn out and bemused by the shocking events of the last few days; she needed rest. She shut her eyes and tried to sleep, and managed to fall into an uneasy doze, where all the figures of her past life—Luke, Harriet, Brearley, Ivy Hoad, Miriam, and Johnnie—came and went across her dreams like figures in a complicated dance.

Suddenly she started up, wide awake; the scene at Brearley's graveside seemed at last to have struck home to her consciousness with piercing force. She asked herself how she had endured it, how she had managed not to sink into the ground with shame. The scene was on the surface silly and absurd, but in its essence appalling; it had been witnessed by practically the whole adult population of High Roebuck, and would, no doubt, go down into local history for generations. Imogen's cheeks burned as she thought of it, and anger against Mrs. Thornton rose hot in her heart; she told herself that the instant Brearley's affairs were settled and her presence and signature no longer required in High Roebuck, she would shake the dust of that hateful place off her feet, and take Richard and Mrs. Armitage away, far, far away, for a long sojourn in some quiet, beautiful place by the sea where she could reknit her shattered nerves and take possession of her personality again. It seemed to Imogen that in the last years of her life with Brearley the real Imogen had been buried beneath a mound of rubbish about money, and time and quiet would be needed if she were ever to re-emerge. Yes, the three of them would go away to the sea; she would rent a pleasant sunny house, and take Jennifer and the Roebuck Hall parlourmaid and Richard's nursery governess with her. Richard should have brief lessons in the morning, and run wild in the fresh pure air for the rest of the day—it might do wonders for the child. These calm, peaceful prospects soothed Imogen, and she laid her aching head upon the

pillow again and lost herself in plans for Richard's future.

She was not left long in enjoyment of these, however, for a maid came up to say that Mr. Armitage was downstairs and would like to speak to her for a moment. With a sigh Imogen roused herself and dragged her heavy limbs downstairs. She found her mother and Luke standing together in the library. Mrs. Armitage looked pale and bleak, and Luke's air was very grim.

"You're soon back, Luke," said Imogen. She glanced at the clock and saw that she had slept longer than she thought. "Well, what is it now?" she demanded, seating herself and preparing to hear of further insults from her mother-in-law.

"Mrs. Thornton and Harriet have gone to look at the wreaths," explained Luke, "so I took the opportunity to come round here. I've just been hearing from Hesketh about Thornton's will and I thought you'd better know its provisions."

"Oh yes," said Imogen without any great enthusiasm. "Though I think I know most of them already."

"I don't think you do," said Luke grimly. "I've just been saying to mother that I don't think you'll care for them much."

"Don't delay so, Luke; tell us at once," said Mrs. Armitage impatiently.

"Well, part of it is very complicated," began Luke. "Harriet gets nothing, and you get practically nothing, Imogen; but there are trusts for Harriet's children, and trusts for Richard, and arrangements for if Richard dies without issue, and goodness knows what. However," he added dryly, "you needn't worry about all that, because there's a clause which invalidates it, as it happens; if Mrs. Thornton survives Brearley she gets the lot, and, of course, she has survived him."

"But what about Richard?" cried Mrs. Armitage. Luke

shrugged his shoulders. "What does Richard get, Luke?" urged his mother irritably. "Tell us at once."

"I tell you Richard gets nothing—Mrs. Thornton has the lot, lock, stock, and barrel," said Luke with emphasis. "Including the Hall."

"Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it!" cried Mrs. Armitage with spirit. "No man on earth would disinherit his son like that, and no decent lawyer would draw such a will."

"You'll find one man has done it, I'm afraid," said Luke.

"Well!" said Mrs. Armitage. She sat down abruptly. "Isn't Richard even *mentioned?"* she enquired in a feeble tone.

"Mrs. Thornton is empowered to provide for Richard and Harriet if and as she thinks fit, from certain specified sums," said her son.

"Come, that's a trifle better," said Mrs. Armitage faintly.

"But I don't understand," protested Imogen. "There was a splendid arrangement for Richard—Brearley showed it me—and I was to be his trustee with Mr. Hesketh."

"Not in this will," explained Luke wearily. "This one was made only a month or two ago, you know, when Thornton wrote and told me he'd cut Harriet off with a shilling."

"Poor Brearley!" exclaimed Imogen involuntarily. It struck her as really pathetic that Brearley, alienated from his wife by her own conduct and that fatal misunderstanding about Johnnie, caring little for his son, and bound by his own repeated statement not to benefit Harriet, had turned thus to his mother. The clause enriching Mrs. Thornton was a typical example of his ingenious legal ideas, enabling him at the same time to get even with the Armitages and benefit Harriet without appearing to do so; and no doubt young Hesketh had yielded to its insertion because of the unlikeli-

hood of Mrs. Thornton's surviving her son. "Poor Brearley!" repeated his widow.

"Really, Imogen!" cried Luke, irritated. "You keep your tenderness for the wrong time, I must say. Don't you realise how serious this is for you? Don't you understand that you're dependent on Mrs. Thornton's good will, and that that's a minus quantity? Thornton had evidently turned against you as well as against Harriet; there's no mistaking that. It's a pity you couldn't get on better with him."

"And who will benefit, pray, by my not getting on with him?" cried Imogen, angered by her brother's tone. "Harriet! And you know it, Luke."

Luke turned away with a groan. "That's just what I'm afraid of," he said gloomily. "Mrs. Thornton's talking about it already. It will spoil everything."

"Of course Mrs. Thornton will provide suitably for Richard's maintenance, as she will for Harriet's," said Mrs. Armitage, recovering her nerve. "It was obviously Brearley's intention that his mother should take care of the interests of both of them."

"Obviously it was; but will she do it?" said Luke grimly. "I have my doubts. You should hear her on the subject of Richard and Imogen. Why on earth did you let Thornton make an idiotic will like that, Imogen?"

"Of course if I'd known he was going to be killed within a month I wouldn't have done," said Imogen sarcastically.

"Pray don't let us have any bickering over it," said Mrs. Armitage in her stateliest tone. "The harm is done, and no amount of argument will undo it; the only thing left to do is to conciliate Mrs. Thornton."

"Well, you can try," said Luke dryly, "but I think you'll find your work cut out. What seems so odd is that Thornton should happen to make that provision about his mother, apparently so unlikely to survive him, just a few weeks

before he died. It's odd, really; it will make a lot of talk. What with this will, and the accident, and the fuss there's been about myself and Harriet, and one thing and another, really we might be living in a melodrama."

"When you've lived as long as I have, my dear boy," drawled Mrs. Armitage, looking up at him with a pale smile, "you'll realise that life *is* like a melodrama, except that the poetic justice at the end usually falls on the wrong person."

III

The Thornton affairs now rapidly became, as Luke had prognosticated, the talk of Hudley. The quarrel, the accident, and the scene at the graveside were already public property and the theme of endless comment, and the provisions of Brearley's will did not fail to get abroad, adding a thrilling climax to a series of events already sufficiently dramatic. The whole story was certainly curious, and some people refused to believe it, saying that it was too good to be true. Some, on the other hand, believed it with additions; they said that Imogen had played fast and loose with that young Talland fellow, married Brearley to save her reputation, and made him so increasingly miserable that when he left Roebuck Hall that afternoon he did not intend to return to it alive. According to these critics, the will showed as plainly as a pikestaff how that motor accident was to be regarded; and this view drew support from the utterances of Mrs. Thornton, who went about Hudley saying openly that two men had killed themselves for Imogen's sake, and inviting her auditors to judge the character of a woman of whom that could be said.

"She never made him comfortable from the first," she would exclaim to anyone who condoled with her about her son. "She never tried to make him comfortable. I told Brearley how it would be from the first, but he wouldn't listen to me, poor boy, and now he's paid for it with his life." At this point her voice usually broke and tears came

into her eyes; she added with vehemence: "She's a wicked girl—wicked!" and embarked on a garbled version of Imogen's "confession," as she called it, about Johnnie.

The poor woman's grief for her son seemed to grow no less as the days went on, and the only thing which comforted her was the thought of Imogen's pennilessness. She could not dissimulate her delight at her boy's getting the better of his mercenary wife in that way, and whenever it was referred to a gratified smile spread over her simple face and a look of pleased cunning lighted her reddened eyes. In this the great bulk of public opinion went with her; wherever men were gathered together Brearley's disposition of his worldly goods was regarded as a triumph of West Riding shrewdness and mother wit, and the story never failed to be received with appreciative chuckles and knowing shakes of the head. Young women, too, who felt that if Brearley had given them the chance he had wasted on the undeserving Imogen they would have known very well how to make him comfortable, laughed at the trick fate had played her in making Mrs. Thornton Brearley's survivor, and said she had got no more than her deserts. A few simple generous souls said that there was probably right and wrong on both sides, and no doubt circumstances had been too strong for the unlucky pair, but nobody took much notice of such maunderings.

Imogen, however, who made a beautiful and impressive figure in her widow's weeds, did not lack partisans. Men who had had experience of Thornton's driving observed forcibly that there was nothing at all remarkable in his having a motor accident a month after he made his will; the marvel was that he had never had one before. Others again—these chiefly women of middle age—observed with venom that Brearley was drunken and dissipated, and Imogen was well rid of him at any price; in their eyes she was

another addition to the long line of martyred wives. Still others, older and more sober spirits who happened to have met Richard, shook their heads and said that whatever his wife's faults, Brearley should have made definite provision for that child. Their young opponents thereupon said impatiently that of course Mrs. Thornton would provide for Richard—there was plenty of money in the Thornton family for all of them—and Imogen would not suffer monetarily but only in prestige from the public insult; considering her behaviour, they added, she might think herself lucky to get off so lightly. At this their elders merely shook their heads again, and observed with a cynical smile that they would believe in Mrs. Thornton's providing for Imogen when they saw it.

In the event their credulity was not submitted to this strain.

Mrs. Thornton said a hundred times a day that of course she would provide amply for Richard, but that she and Brearley owed Imogen nothing, and she intended to give her just that. Imogen did not petition her to change her mind, but with her son left Roebuck Hall and went to Royd Bank, where they eked out a meagre existence on what the years had left of Mrs. Armitage's income. (An interesting anecdote arose in Hudley at this point; it was said that Imogen had tried to remove from the Hall a large quantity of furniture which was not hers, and that Mrs. Thornton had met it in the drive and turned it back. Imogen's supporters, on the other hand, said that Mrs. Thornton actually would not allow her to remove the grand piano which had been her wedding-present from Brearley. The truth was that Harriet had bought the piano out of the money which her mother lost no time in settling upon her; Harriet had ordered the packers to prepare the piano for removal to Garsdale, and Mrs. Thornton had rather dramati-

cally countermanded the order, for she did not intend her daughter to go to Garsdale just yet.)

Imogen's one remaining hope was for peace after war, port after stormy seas; the port might be as humble as it liked, provided it was out of sight and sound of Mrs. Thornton, and she begged her mother—on whom, for the moment at least, she was entirely dependent—to let Royd Bank and establish herself at some quiet and distant place by the sea. They could live more cheaply, she urged, in a quiet place where they need not keep up appearances; and so much scandal had attached itself to her name that Hudley was no longer pleasant for her. Mrs. Armitage, however, obstinately refused; she told her daughter that it was her duty to remain in Hudley till Brearley's affairs were settled, and Mrs. Thornton made some provision for Richard. She did not attempt to deny that scandal about Imogen existed and made Hudley extremely unpleasant; but she stated, not without dignity, that she had lived down scandals for Imogen's sake, and Imogen must do the same for Richard. In a word, Mrs. Armitage had transferred her allegiance from her daughter to her grandson, and she meant to hold on in Hudley, at whatever cost of unpleasantness and humiliation, until some of the Thornton property found its way into little Richard's pocket.

Poor little Richard was indeed the centre of much wrangling. Harriet wished to provide for him out of the abundant income which was now hers, but when the matter came to the notice of Mrs. Thornton, she raised her hands and made an outcry. Her grandson, she said, was her affair, and Harriet was not to dream of using her money in that way—she would need it for her own children one of these days. Harriet and Luke were pleased by this sign of kindly feeling for Richard, and waited hopefully for the outcome. After some delay, considerable vacillation, and an immensity of

talk, Mrs. Thornton caused young Hesketh to write to her daughter-in-law and inform her that she would be entirely responsible for Richard's upbringing and welfare if Imogen would give him up to her.

This letter reached Royd Bank at breakfast-time, and Imogen opened it with a sigh of distaste—she did not relish Mr. Hesketh's communications, and had no hope of good from them.

"Well, what has young Hesketh to say this morning?" demanded Mrs. Armitage, as she poured milk on Richard's porridge.

"It seems to be some sort of proposal from Mrs. Thornton," replied Imogen, wearily scanning the lines.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Armitage on a hopeful note.

When Imogen had read the letter she passed it over to her mother with a scornful laugh. Mrs. Armitage inspected it through her lorgnette, and observed that though of course the offer could not be accepted, that it should be made at all was a hopeful sign.

"A hopeful sign!" exclaimed Imogen, revolted. "You call it a hopeful sign that she would want to take him from me?"

"Who does Granny want to take from you, Mother?" enquired Richard at this, fixing his eyes on her suspiciously.

"Nobody, dear," said Imogen hastily. "Eat your porridge while it's hot."

Richard was silent, and devoted himself to his porridge, but after a few moments he paused in this process, and repeated in his heavy tones: "Who does Granny want to take from you, Mother?"

He was capable of repeating a question in identically the same words a hundred times until he received an answer which satisfied him, and Imogen sighed again. It was no part of her plan for Richard's education to tell him lies,

but on the other hand she prided herself on saying to him nothing but good about his father's family. Mrs. Armitage came to her rescue by sending the child an errand into the kitchen to Jennifer, of whom he was very fond. Later in the day, however, in the midst of an impassioned game on the floor with an unpainted wooden train—a hygienic present from Luke—Richard suddenly paused, and sitting back on his heels said thoughtfully: "Who does Granny want to take from you, Mother?"

"Well, never mind who," said Imogen in a soothing tone. "She isn't going to have him."

Richard considered this for a long moment with a dissatisfied air before he gave vent to a prolonged shriek in a minor key and caused his train to enter an imaginary tunnel.

Imogen could hardly believe that Mrs. Thornton's proposal was meant to be taken seriously, but being assured, on enquiry from Mr. Hesketh, that it was so, she wrote a curt and decided refusal. Mrs. Armitage, to whom Imogen offered her letter to read, disapproved of it; she said it was cold and rude, and surely Imogen could have said something warmer and more maternal about never being able to part with little Richard. Imogen irritably rewrote the letter; she omitted the sentence which her mother thought rude, but could not bring herself to use sentiment about Richard to Mrs. Thornton. That lady tossed her head when she received Imogen's note, sniffed, and said that if what she had offered was not good enough for Madam—meaning Imogen—she could do without altogether. When Harriet heard the terms of her mother's offer she was shocked, and spoke of them to her mother with a disapproval which her mother found romantic and high-flown and altogether too much like the Armitages to be satisfactory. Poor Harriet wrote a long account of all this to Luke, and painfully resumed her timid efforts—which were so easily frus-

trated by Mrs. Thornton's command of violence—to supply Richard's want from her own abundance. Mrs. Thornton again intervened, making a perfectly outrageous scene in the office of the flustered Mr. Hesketh; whereupon Harriet wept, and sent long telegrams to her harassed husband.

In the rare moments when Imogen's mind was free enough from these vexatious wranglings to view the situation impersonally, she felt extremely sorry for Harriet and for Luke. Since her return from Charford Harriet had not been very happy at Roebuck Dene, and under Luke's tuition she had grown to think that all the ignoble things which troubled her in life belonged to High Roebuck, the Thornton family, and the state of being rich; to leave all that behind and go and be poor with Luke had been an exquisite dream from which she had had a very rough awakening. As for Luke, Imogen's heart was wrung with pity for him, for she saw that he felt caught in the toils. Every day that passed he loved Harriet more dearly, and every day that passed he wished more earnestly that he had never met her. There was nobody whom Luke despised more than people who lived on money which they did not earn; and if anyone had been so rash as to wish to settle a large sum of money on him he would have made short work of them—or at least he thought so. But this money was not his; it was Harriet's, and tied so tightly to Harriet and her children that he could not touch it; he felt the responsibility of advising Harriet not to accept it to be altogether too heavy for him, especially as Harriet took as a profound truth every word he uttered, and obeyed his slightest whim implicitly. Harriet was a child in business matters, and Mrs. Thornton's manner of dealing with them made one perfectly understand why her husband had left the bulk of his property to Brearley; so it fell to Luke to

instruct the pair in the filling up of forms, and to see that their signatures were appended in the proper places. Perplexed in the extreme as to his real duty in the case, Luke toiled faithfully and conscientiously over the settling up of the Thornton property, because somehow he could not do anything else without being a perfect brute to his wife; but he loathed the task, and each fresh letter and paper, each appointment with Mr. Hesketh (whom he thought an incompetent young ass), each conversation on the telephone, was an increased exasperation to him, and fretted his already harassed nerves. He lost his candid youthful air, and wore instead a constant look of worry and irritation; indeed, he bade fair to become a man with a grievance —the grievance being that circumstances did not allow him the luxury of a clear conscience. It was several weeks before Luke could leave High Roebuck at all after Brearley's death, and when he did eventually manage to betake himself to Garsdale, he had to leave Harriet behind him. Mrs. Thornton was at first really too distracted to be left alone; then, later, she was moving into Roebuck Hall and needed her daughter's help in this triumphant but complicated process. A flow of letters and telegrams came to Luke from his wife, and he spent many week-ends at Roebuck Hall —far too many, indeed; he reproached himself bitterly with having already become careless about money because Harriet had such a lot—but his dream of happy married life in Garsdale seemed each day to get farther and farther away from fulfilment. Week-ends with Harriet, too, were not all bliss; a glorious joy on Saturday, at the early parting on Monday morning they were altogether too poignant to be pleasant, especially if Harriet cried, as she often did. Many times Luke arrived on Saturday determined to take his wife home with him on Monday though the heavens fell; but as soon as he saw Mrs. Thornton he realised

how impossible it was to leave her alone in her present condition, and his hope died in his breast. Then when there was nothing else more pressingly troublesome on hand the question of Richard rose up to worry him; Luke had really got past caring what became of Imogen, but he felt the responsibility of Richard acutely. He stiffened Harriet in her determination to do something for Richard, thus laying himself open to reproaches from Mrs. Thornton on the subject of Imogen's behaviour as a wife and the mercenary nature of the Armitages generally. Mrs. Thornton did not fail to make these reproaches, for Luke was not as high in her favour as formerly; she thought him ungrateful about Harriet's settlement, and her views about unmarried daughters had changed with the coming of her own loneliness—she thought it would have been much nicer if Harriet could stay permanently at home and look after her mother. Or, if she must marry, she might have married the manager of Thornton Mills—it would have been much more satisfactory. To poor Luke, on the contrary, the only thing which seemed good in the whole appalling muddle was that he and Harriet had married before the catastrophe.

Harriet's attempts to help Richard, Mrs. Thornton's hysterical vetoes, and Luke's reception of worrying telegrams became a natural sequence of events, and months passed by while they repeated themselves with exasperating monotony. Autumn became winter, and Richard caught a heavy cold and needed the luxuries he had been accustomed to having at Roebuck Hall. Harriet, who visited Royd Bank regularly, with Mrs. Thornton's expressed disapproval but tacit sanction, tried to touch her mother's heart by her accounts of his illness; but Mrs. Thornton hoped it would force Imogen to agree to her terms and give up the child, and seemed almost disappointed when he recovered with fair rapidity.

Harriet falteringly tried to make little gifts to help Richard's convalescence, and Imogen did her best to take them; but she understood Miss Hoad's susceptibilities better now; she might have accepted a yearly allowance for Richard from Harriet, but a settled doctor's bill or a new winter coat was simply unendurable. Winter softened into early spring; a colossal marble monument, of which the style and inscription were in the worst possible taste, was erected by Mrs. Thornton over Brearley's grave. Imogen winced at its vulgarity whenever she laid upon it her small offerings of flowers—small because she could not afford to spend much upon this luxury. These flowers Mrs. Thornton constantly threw away into a waste basket provided for the purpose when she visited the place with her own magnificent tributes from the Roebuck Hall greenhouses; Harriet, her fair face flushed with indignation at her mother's barbarism, as constantly surreptitiously replaced them.

By this time Luke and Harriet loathed the very name of the Thornton property; they felt that life had somehow degenerated into a repulsive and unseemly wrangle, and despaired of ever feeling happy again. Mrs. Thornton was less fit than ever to be left alone, for she seemed positively to enjoy turning the knife in her own wound; she caused Newsome (whose collar-bone was now quite recovered) to drive her into Hudley almost every morning in the hope of seeing Imogen, so that she might pass her daughter-in-law without a sign of recognition. Having done this successfully, she trembled all over and wept hysterically upon Harriet's shoulder, repeating that Imogen was a wicked girl and had never made Brearley happy from the first. Poor Harriet, who had had a very high standard of duty planted in her at Charford, defended Imogen as well as she could; but her simple nature was not equal to the complex strain put upon it; heartsick with longing for her

husband, she began to look pale and thin and to weep at nights almost as hysterically as her mother.

To Imogen her stay in Hudley in the hope of securing—as she was sure High Roebuck called it—pickings from the Thornton estate, became daily more degrading and less tolerable; and she redoubled her attempts to persuade Mrs. Armitage to leave the town. To her former arguments she added the fear that Mrs. Thornton would really become unsettled in her wits if she was subjected much longer to the exasperation of her daughter-in-law's presence. If the Royd Bank household left Hudley, urged Imogen, Mrs. Thornton's emotions would gradually subside, and there would be a hope for Harriet and Luke. Mrs. Armitage shrugged her shoulders over Harriet and Luke, and said that their separation was their own affair—it was the fault of Harriet's timid nerves, and in her opinion they were foolish to put up with it. She reiterated her determination to stay in Hudley till some provision was made for Richard, quoted the proverb "out of sight, out of mind," and said that in time Mrs. Thornton was bound to remember that Richard was her son's son.

"Do you imagine that Mrs. Thornton is fond of Richard, Mother?" demanded Imogen at this coldly. "If so you're much mistaken."

"Richard is Brearley's son," repeated Mrs. Armitage with conviction. "In time Mrs. Thornton is bound to remember that."

To Imogen's astonishment this theory justified itself on Richard's birthday, a lovely spring morning, when Newsome drew up at the Royd Bank gate and Harriet ran blithely up the path to announce that Mrs. Thornton begged Imogen, as a favour, to let Richard spend the day with her. The request, of course, had not originally been couched quite like that; but Mrs. Thornton had of her own volition remembered

that it was Richard's birthday, and that, as Mrs. Armitage said, Richard was her son's son, and she had let fall a few softened expressions concerning the child. The good-hearted Harriet, ever on the watch for just such signs, had immediately suggested having Richard to Roebuck Hall for the day; and before Mrs. Thornton quite knew what she was doing the two were excitedly planning the whole affair —Mrs. Thornton's heart finding a wonderful relief and expansion in arranging all the details. The two discussed whether to telephone or send a note, and finally decided that Harriet and Newsome should fetch Richard—Harriet should call in town on the way and buy for him some particularly attractive and expensive toy. This toy, a mechanical cat which moved its paws and tail as it traversed the ground —Richard had an almost excessive love for animals—Harriet now held in her hands, offering it for Mrs. Armitage's inspection and approval. Mrs. Armitage was overjoyed by Harriet's message, and received the cat with a face wreathed in smiles, but Imogen's brow darkened. She knew rather more than her mother of Mrs. Thornton's past behaviour to Richard, and was not minded to surrender the child to her mercies even for one day. She was overborne, however, by the arguments of Mrs. Armitage, the pleading of Harriet, and her own sense of what was proper; reluctantly she took the cat and went upstairs to prepare Richard for the outing.

As a great treat the child had been allowed to help Jennifer in turning out one of the bedrooms, and he was distinctly dirty. Tact had always to be used in accustoming Richard to a new plan, and Imogen washed him without referring to his grandmother's invitation, merely saying, as she dried his hands, that Auntie Harriet had come and had brought him a beautiful birthday present, which he would find on his bed in Imogen's room. Thus stimulated, the child ran

happily on ahead, seized upon the cat with cries of joy. Imogen wound it up and made it perform across the carpet.

"It would go well down the hall at home," observed Richard.

By "home" he always meant Roebuck Hall, and Imogen thought the opportunity excellent for introducing Mrs. Thornton's invitation. To her dismay Richard's eyes at once opened wide in horrified alarm, the corners of his mouth turned down, and he broke into a despairing howl. In his own way the child was not without shrewdness, and at the time of the letter containing Mrs. Thornton's offer he had received a strong, if vague, impression that he was the person whom his grandmother wished to snatch away from Imogen. This fear had haunted his dreams, and the mere idea of seeing Mrs. Thornton terrified him. After the manner of children, he would not say what was the matter with him, or why he did not wish to go to Roebuck Hall, but he wailed "No! No!" in a tone of heart-rending appeal, and pushed Imogen's hands away when she attempted to change his suit.

"But think what a nice present Granny's sent you!" urged Imogen, striving to undo his buttons.

For reply Richard hurled the cat violently into the corner of the room.

Imogen sighed, but she thought this was just one of the wayward moods to which her son was unfortunately so liable, and kneeling before him on the floor, she persevered in undressing him. But as he stood there in his socks and shirt, his thin, half-naked little body so shook with sobs, and his childish face was so contorted with anguish, that she relented and caught him to her breast in a warm embrace. Richard cast his arms tightly about her neck and continued to wail distressfully. His sobs were evidently audible in the

room below, for Mrs. Armitage presently came up with a clouded brow.

"What is the matter, Imogen?" she demanded in a tone of stern rebuke. "You mustn't let him cry like this."

"I don't want to go—I don't want to go," wailed Richard heavily, burying his face in his mother's neck.

"Oh yes, you do," said Mrs. Armitage, in an airy, grown-up tone. "You'll have a lovely birthday with Granny Thornton and Auntie Harriet." She advanced on the child with his clean tunic in her hand.

Richard's wail rose into a scream, and he clung in agonised tenacity to his mother. Imogen felt that the scene was revolting, and she gazed up defiantly at Mrs. Armitage.

"I shan't make him go if he doesn't want to," she said, rebellion in her tone.

"Don't be so childish, Imogen!" cried her mother with impatience. "He *must* go. What's the good of indulging him at his own expense like that? He won't thank you for it when he's older."

"Well, you make him go, then," said Imogen sullenly, rising and with difficulty detaching Richard's arms from her neck. "I can't."

Mrs. Armitage was usually able to manage Richard better than anyone else, for she employed endless patience, tact, and skill with the child; and she now drew him to her hopefully. But to-day Richard was neither to be soothed nor coerced; to an accompaniment of wild weeping he pulled away from her with all his might, made himself a dead weight on her arm, stretched out his free hand to his mother in a piteous, quivering appeal which wrung Imogen's heart, shouted "No! No!" to all Mrs. Armitage's blandishments, and finally threw himself upon the floor, kicking and screaming, nearly frantic with rage and grief. (By one of life's little ironies he resembled his father and grand-

mother more strongly when he was in a passion than at any other time.) Harriet was alarmed by the noise, and came rushing upstairs, and she and Imogen, thoroughly frightened, mingled their tears with Richard's and trembled with him. Mrs. Armitage was not so easily daunted, but she could do nothing with the terrified and maddened child, and when he began to hold his breath and turn livid with the intensity of his screaming she ceased her attempts at persuasion and devoted herself to soothing him. Once roused, however, Richard was not easily soothed, and in the end they had to telephone for the doctor, who prescribed bed and a sedative, and said that Richard's temperature was up and that he must on no account be thwarted. Imogen sat beside him all the day, holding his hand; and Harriet was obliged to return to Roebuck Hall without him.

The next day was Saturday. In the afternoon Luke appeared at Royd Bank, and looking very grave told his mother that he feared there was now very little chance of Mrs. Thornton's doing anything for Richard—indeed, at present there was no chance at all.

"Harriet did her best," he explained. "She said that Richard was ill. But of course it all came out in the end, and Mrs. Thornton thinks you must have said things to Richard against her." At this Mrs. Armitage gave an exasperated sigh.

Harriet, continued Luke, could be relied on to do something for Richard, but that would be later, when Mrs. Thornton's furious resentment at this fresh insult, as she chose to regard it, should have died down. Naturally Harriet did not want to quarrel with her mother, even in so good a cause as Richard's, and he thought the difficulty would best be solved for the present by he himself making his mother an allowance.

"An allowance out of *your* income?" said his mother sarcastically. "You mean to live on Harriet, then?"

Luke winced and coloured, but managed to say nothing; his look, however, was sufficiently expressive. There was a long pause.

"Well?" demanded Luke impatiently at last. "Do you agree?"

Mrs. Armitage slowly shook her head. With her customary frigid calm she then proceeded to throw in her hand and give up the game. Imogen and herself, she said, wanted nothing from anyone, nor did Richard; the three of them could manage quite well on what she had. They had made up their minds to leave Hudley, and perhaps Luke would be kind enough—if he could find time amidst his many preoccupations—to see that Royd Bank was immediately advertised for sale.

Luke could not conceal his relief at this decision.

IV

When Mrs. Thornton heard that Imogen and her mother had decided to leave Hudley her face brightened wonderfully, and she cried out an eager wish that Luke and Harriet should buy Royd Bank and live there. Luke could put up a doctor's plate and lamp, and gradually build up a practice; and Harriet would be near to support her mother's old age, at hand in Hudley instead of inaccessible in far-off Garsdale. In vain did the horrified Luke protest that practices were not built up in a day like that; Mrs. Thornton became tearful, and urged her own loneliness and old age so pathetically that Luke's heart was harrowed, and Harriet sobbed out her conviction that she would never be able to leave her mother alone with so many sorrows—she had thought so for some time, but now she was sure. Not for the first time did Luke congratulate himself on Mrs. Thornton's possession of Roebuck Hall, so that she could not make a third in his household without losing a triumph over Imogen which was altogether too splendid to forgo.

Luke came to his mother, and confiding to her Mrs. Thornton's scheme about Royd Bank, urged her to change her mind and stay in Hudley, but to his disgust Mrs. Armitage's face also brightened, and she said she thought it was an excellent suggestion; Harriet would be at hand to console her mother, Luke would be near enough to keep an eye on the multitudinous Thornton affairs, and Richard would have powerful friends always at his grandmother's ear. At this Luke became nearly distracted; if he had had

his way he would never have seen Mrs. Thornton or heard of the Thornton affairs again, and he emphatically did not want to live within five or six miles of his mother-in-law. On the other hand, there had positively been moments when Mrs. Thornton had suggested his establishing himself with Harriet and her mother in Roebuck Hall; the Royd Bank scheme was at least better than that, and it offered a prospect of soon getting Harriet to himself which Luke found extremely tempting. He demurred to the scheme, however, on professional grounds, affecting to Mrs. Thornton a certainty on this point which he did not really feel. Just at this moment an elderly, easy-going Hudleian doctor had a severe illness, and decided to take a partner, and Luke's doom was sealed. Mrs. Thornton's prompt settlement on her daughter had inclined Hudleian opinion favourably to Luke, and there was no difficulty in negotiating the partnership; Harriet became the owner of Royd Bank—Mrs. Thornton, of course, said that she gave far too much for it, and seemed to consider that in paying over the purchase money Harriet had provided quite sufficiently for her nephew—and Luke became eager, though he tried to disguise it, for his mother and sister to leave the town.

Mrs. Armitage and Imogen decided to go to a south-coast watering-place, and stay in a boarding-house there till they could find some suitably modest residence to accommodate themselves and Richard. Jennifer they could not afford to keep, and though Harriet would have been glad of her experienced services, Mrs. Thornton did not like her, and objected to her being retained, so she had to set about finding another situation. Her ability made this a simple matter, and she was urged by several housewives to go to them at once, but she insisted on staying to help Mrs. Armitage through the turmoil of removal. This proved considerable, for some furniture had to be packed and stored, some emptied

and sold, some draped with protective coverings against the onslaught of paperhangers and left for Harriet and Luke; trifles with a merely sentimental value had to be destroyed, and cherished relics abandoned; the house became at length a mere chaos of unrelated objects, amidst which stalked solid warehousemen laden with china, which they deposited carefully in huge wooden crates. Richard enjoyed these preparations immensely, and Mrs. Armitage took them with a stoical calm which was really magnificent. She was leaving her house, in which she had lived ever since her marriage, to the daughter of a woman she detested, and the fact that she was so leaving it showed that her plans for her own daughter were utterly confounded and brought to naught; but she still retained her serene artificial smile, her calm drawl, her erect bearing, and her superior Armitage air of knowing just how everything ought to be done, nor was she ever sufficiently irritated to reproach Imogen or speak sharply to Richard. Luke's future occupation of Royd Bank gave her such an excellent excuse for leaving Hudley, and she made such excellent use of it, that her friends were completely mystified, and thought that all that scandal about Mrs. Thornton and her daughter-in-law must have been mere rumour. Imogen did her best to live up to the standard of dignity and calm set by her mother, but the fatigues of the removal exhausted her, and she longed more and more earnestly for the day when they should leave Hudley for ever.

At length they reached their last day in the town; by the middle of the afternoon everything was ready, the house was a mere shell, their trunks stood packed and labelled in the hall, and they were all three dressed in their travelling clothes, ready for the journey on the morrow. As a last duty Imogen had visited her two graves—Brearley's and Johnnie's—and laid flowers upon them. Beside each she

strove to recall the past and to have high, sad, tragic feelings worthy of her solemn farewell, but she was too worn out to feel anything of the kind. It was a glowing summer's day, and she felt hot and tired and shabby as she trailed about in her heavy black, to which the dust seemed to cling; in the trams there were many young girls in soft, light, cool summer dresses, with sparkling eyes and rounded arms; youth lay before them, but behind Imogen, and by the time she regained Royd Bank she felt inexpressibly weary and dejected. Richard saw her from the window, and came to open the door for her; but even he was hot and tired, and his greeting was less enthusiastic than usual. Imogen threw off her hat and sank into one of the chairs in the drawing-room which were to remain for Harriet's use; Richard perched himself on a shrouded table, and had to be reproved, and at this he seemed undecided whether or not to shed tears.

"Where's Granny?" enquired Imogen wearily.

"Upstairs having a bath," replied the realistic Richard in a half wail, his lower lip trembling as though tears were about to win the day. "But I should think she's finished now; she's been in ages."

Just then Mrs. Armitage entered, looking cool and competent as usual.

"Well—you've been?" she demanded briskly of her daughter. Imogen nodded, too tired to speak. "Run and tell Jennifer to bring tea now, dear," Mrs. Armitage commanded her grandson. "Tell her mother's come."

Richard ran off, and Mrs. Armitage, pulling down blinds against the heat and opening windows, began to discuss with her daughter the last remaining details of the removal.

"I think everything is ready now," she concluded as Jennifer came in with tea. "I've written a line to Harriet. I don't think there's anything else."

"No, I don't think so," agreed Imogen listlessly, her mind wandering over all the people in Hudley or High Roebuck to whom she might be supposed to owe a parting duty. Suddenly she exclaimed and sat upright. "Mother!" she cried. "The Hoads!"

Mrs. Armitage gave her a curious glance, and Imogen remembered that her mother knew no reason why she should be interested in any Hoad but Miriam.

"I must see Miriam before I go," she explained hastily. "Poor thing! I've never heard a word from her since last September."

"Won't a letter do?" said Mrs. Armitage with distaste, filling the white kitchen cups which were the only ones the warehousemen had left. "You can't go all that way this hot afternoon, Imogen, with such a long journey before you to-morrow."

"I must go," stated Imogen with finality. "Where's the time-table?"

Richard produced it, and finding that there was a train shortly Imogen hastily swallowed a cup of tea and left the house. The sun seemed as strong as ever, and the melting asphalt moved beneath her feet; the awkwardness of her errand, too, added to these discomforts. How, she asked herself, could she possibly have forgotten the Hoads so long? In the first few days after Brearley's death she had hourly expected some communication from Ivy; when none came she decided that there had been nothing serious between her husband and that little minx—Miriam, with her intense, serious, puritanic nature, had, of course, exaggerated—and with a sigh of relief she dismissed the Hoads from her mind, promising herself that later, when time had blurred the edges of the Brearley-Ivy episode, she would see Miriam and put things straight between them. But then there had been the trouble of the will, and it was out

of her power to offer help to Miriam or monetary consolation to Ivy; then she had had to move from Roebuck Hall; and then there had been the whole protracted wrangle with Mrs. Thornton about Richard, and the child's winter illness, and the trouble about Harriet and Luke, and the decision to sell Royd Bank—one exasperation had followed so quickly upon another that she had utterly forgotten Ivy and Miriam, who might in a sense be said to be the prime movers of the whole affair, until this, her last day in the West Riding.

As she paced the hot station platform, waiting for the train, she began to dread the coming interview. Miriam might choose to heap reproaches on her which would not be undeserved. She had forgotten the Hoads for months; she did not even know whether Ivy still worked in Booth Street; and how Miriam had managed to get through the winter without her health-giving cheques she had not troubled to enquire. She felt that her conduct had been base and selfish, and envied Miriam her fine gesture in the return of the cheque. A sudden qualm seized her; suppose, after all, she had been wrong about Miriam's reason for returning the cheque? Suppose, after all, there had simply been some informality in the way it was drawn? She reflected that Brearley had admitted that he found pleasure in Ivy's company. Still, Miriam's return of the cheque at that particular moment might have been mere coincidence. Her pace became quicker at the thought, and her cheeks burned; when the train at last appeared she climbed into it hurriedly, and its slow progress through the hot stuffy tunnels, its long pauses at the quiet empty stations, fretted her overwrought nerves until she could have screamed. When, however, she reached Bradford and saw on the tell-tale a finger-board announcing an immediate train back to Hudley, in a sudden revulsion of feeling she felt inclined to take it and leave the Hoads

to their fate. What, after all, did she owe Ivy? What could she say or do which would help poor Miriam? She reproached herself sharply for this lack of courage, and dragging herself out into the hot streets, mounted a tram, and eventually found herself in front of Miriam's door. She found that she was trembling as she raised her hand to the knocker. What should she say if Ivy suddenly stood before her? She knocked; there was a movement within the house, and her heart seemed to turn over in fear. The door opened; with an effort Imogen managed to raise her eyes to the person who stood before her, and found herself face to face with a kindly, stout, untidy-looking creature whom she recognised as Ivy's mother, Lois.

Overcome with complex emotions, she stammered helplessly, and Lois stared at her without recognition for a moment.

"Why, it's Mrs. Thornton!" she exclaimed at length with an air of pleased surprise. "I hardly knew you at first." She drew back to allow Imogen to pass. "Come in, do," she said. As Imogen hung back, she added soothingly: "There's only father."

At this Imogen entered, wondering as she did so what had possessed her to come on this mad errand. Mechanically she greeted Mr. Hoad, who sat by the empty hearth in the same attitude of apathetic mildness as that in which she had last seen him; then turning to Lois she murmured: "Where is Miriam?"

Lois's hands flew above her head. "Well!" she cried. "Nay! Didn't you know about Miriam?" Seeing that Imogen knew nothing, she turned to her father and said loudly—Imogen remembered that he was deaf—"Fancy, Father! Mrs. Thornton didn't know about Miriam!"

Mr. Hoad looked impressed, and shook his white head mournfully.

"What is there to know?" demanded Imogen impatiently, her nerves fluttering. "Where is Miriam?"

Lois drew herself up, and announced with unction: "She passed away last February."

"Passed away!" cried Imogen, stupefied. "Do you mean she's dead?"

Lois nodded. "Yes, in February," she repeated.

Imogen sank down on a chair. She now perceived that Lois was in black—hitherto she had not noticed this because her eyes were so used to the sight of mourning, all the Armitages and Thorntons being still garbed in it on Brearley's account.

"Tell me about it," she murmured faintly.

Lois sat down and explained at considerable length and with much nervous embroidery—she was a simple soul, easily flustered—that last summer Miriam had been terribly vexed with Ivy; she did not say why, but that it was on Brearley's account Imogen well understood.

"As if there were any harm in it, Mrs. Thornton!" said Lois in an aggrieved tone, colouring slightly. Miriam had been terribly vexed with Ivy, terribly, and wanted her to leave Booth Street, but Ivy would not. "You know what young people are, Mrs. Thornton," said Lois deprecatingly. Miriam had said that, of course, if Ivy did not leave Booth Street, she could not possibly accept Mrs. Thornton's help to go away in the winter. Here Lois made a diversion into rather fulsome thanks for Imogen's previous cheques and kindness to Miriam generally, which made Imogen wince with shame. Ivy did not put much faith in her aunt's threats, continued Lois; she kept on working at Booth Street—this was Lois's euphemism, apparently, for going to the theatre with Brearley—and then the cheque came, and then one evening when Ivy was out rather late Miriam suddenly rushed out in a fury in spite of Lois's protests. It was raining

heavily at the time. And when she came in, she was terribly exhausted and wet, and she said she had sent back Mrs. Thornton's cheque. (Imogen understood that this had been Luke's wedding day.) And then before they had got over that, as it were, they read in the paper about Mr. Thornton's death. "It was dreadfully sad for you, Mrs. Thornton!" said Lois with sympathy.

"Was she much upset?" asked Imogen dryly at this.

"Miriam?" said Lois enquiringly. Imogen arched her eyebrows, and Lois added hastily: "Ivy was more annoyed than upset, really, Mrs. Thornton, if you know what I mean."

Having seen Ivy, Imogen felt that she could understand that perfectly.

"But Miriam was terribly upset," continued Lois. "It seemed so sad, you know. And then when you never came to see her!"

In the genteel and stilted manner which nervousness evidently produced in her she continued to describe the events of the winter, and Imogen had a poignant picture of poor Miriam, unable to seek health in a milder climate as she had done for the past few years, and eating her heart out about Imogen and Ivy, slowly sinking beneath the bleak north-country winds. On this hot summer's day it was difficult to imagine those winds, and Imogen involuntarily put most of Miriam's distress down to her trouble about Imogen and Ivy. To Miriam it must have seemed that Ivy had ruined Imogen's life. Miriam loved Ivy, but she had loved Imogen too—with a pang Imogen remembered how much Miriam had loved her; she saw Miriam's glowing eyes, her beautiful maternal smile, and heard her thin, strained tones pronouncing Imogen's name with such loving care. Probably, of all the ills which might have come upon Miriam, this of Ivy's hurting Imogen was the very worst. What black

ingratitude, she would think! Why, Imogen had got Ivy that splendid place in Booth Street! Ivy could not be a really nice girl, after all. And Imogen must be badly hurt, for she said not a word about the returned cheque. Miriam had introduced Ivy to Imogen, and this was the result. Thus Miriam must have reasoned to herself in the long dark nights, tossing restlessly upon her bed and coughing. And Imogen had never been to see her! Imogen bowed her head and grieved.

"She had oxygen, you know, but it was no good," concluded Lois. "She didn't seem as if she wanted to get better."

There was a long pause.

"I don't know why we never let you know," said Lois at last simply, in a tone of surprise.

Imogen was touched by the truth of this; for she understood only too well how in the stress of great family events one forgot the people outside the family circle. She sat on in silence for a while, thinking it all over. At last she said:

"And where is Ivy now?"

"Well—she's still in Booth Street, Mrs. Thornton," said Lois, colouring again. "She was always good at her work, you know." She glanced at the clock on the high mantelpiece, and added: "She'll be in any minute now."

Imogen hastily rose.

"I must go," she said. She shook hands with Mr. Hoad, and turned to the door. "It there any little thing I could have as a remembrance of Miriam?" she asked Lois.

"Oh, certainly, Mrs. Thornton," said Lois agreeably. "But I don't just know what."

"Any little thing," said Imogen impatiently, anxious to be gone.

"I've been through all her drawers," hesitated Lois. "I don't just know what you could have, Mrs. Thornton, I'm sure."

It occured to Imogen that anything pretty or useful which Miriam might have happened to possess had already been transferred to Ivy, and she felt angry and inclined to persist in her request.

"What about Miriam's papers?" she cried suddenly. "The papers for her book?"

"Oh, I've burned all that," returned Lois comfortably. "All her letters and papers, you know, I've burned them. I've been through all her drawers. Ivy has her room now."

Imogen stared at her in horrified silence. "You've *burned* them?" she said at last.

"Oughtn't I to have done?" asked Lois in a tone of mild enquiry.

Imogen shrugged her shoulders.

"It doesn't matter," she said wearily. She paused, hesitated, then repeating "It doesn't matter," went towards the door.

Lois now remembered a little clock of Miriam's which she said would be just the very thing for a keepsake, and she kept Imogen chafing on the threshold while she fetched it from upstairs and wrapped it up. Imogen almost snatched it from her hand, uttered a hasty farewell, and sped away up the street. She did not pause till she had reached the station and was safely out of Ivy's way. There was no Hudley train for a considerable time, and she entered the little waiting-room which was the scene of her first confidence to Miriam, and tried to collect her thoughts. But it was already occupied by two or three women and a horde of tired children, and there was no peace to be had there; and she was thankful when at last her train came in and she was borne slowly away up the steep gradient to the first tunnel. She realised then, as she had done on a previous rather fateful return from Bradford, that she was simply tired out. She laid her aching head back against the musty

cushions, and thought vaguely of Miriam and Johnnie, Ivy and Brearley, Luke and Harriet, Mr. Hesketh and Richard; but there was no sense in her musings, the pieces would not fit into any coherent meaning.

The train reached Hudley, and she dragged herself up the hill and took a tram to Royd Bank. The great heat of the afternoon was gone, and a soft breeze cooled the golden evening, but Imogen was too heavily clad for the summer weather, and felt almost sick with fatigue by the time she reached the house which would so soon be Harriet's. In the desolate drawing-room she found Harriet and Luke, come to bid them farewell.

"Well, how is Miriam Louisa?" Luke greeted her.

"As a matter of fact I didn't see her," evaded Imogen, opening her arms to receive the onslaught of Richard, who, it appeared, in spite of all Mrs. Armitage's wiles had obstinately refused to go to bed till his mother came home, though he could hardly keep his eyes open for sleep and heat. Imogen was rather comforted by the child's determination to remain awake to see her; she donned an apron and bathed him, then watched him fall asleep in her bed before she went downstairs and, having glanced in at the remains of supper in the dining-room and decided she could not possibly eat any, took part in the farewell conversation in the drawing-room.

Harriet alone seemed imbued with the solemnity of the occasion; the others took it lightly, joking about some unsuccessful plants of Mrs. Armitage's whose straggling stems were visible from the side window. When the time for parting came Luke seemed rather moved, and kissed his mother and sister tenderly; Mrs. Armitage, however, remained calm, and Imogen was still too tired to feel anything. Luke wished to come to the station next morning and see them off, but his mother begged him not to do so; if he

would come to Royd Bank later in the day, and take the keys from Jennifer, that would be all she desired. Luke rather reluctantly agreed, and Newsome and the car appeared at the gate to take the young couple home to Roebuck Hall.

As the two women turned back up the Royd Bank path Mrs. Armitage said casually to her daughter: "Well, how did you find her?"

"She died in February," replied Imogen laconically.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Armitage. "She was always consumptive, I remember."

V

Next morning Richard, Imogen, and Mrs. Armitage left Hudley by an early train.

A heavy grey heat mist lay brooding over the country; though they had both windows open, the carriage seemed stuffy and airless, and Imogen, still dazed by the early rising and hurried departure, felt that her thoughts too were shrouded in mist—everything seemed vague, confused, and perplexing; nothing in her past life was clear. By and by, however, the sun made its appearance as a faint silver disc which intrigued Richard greatly; the mist retreated to the middle distance and gradually dispersed, clinging last to the hollows; and as the morning wore on and the train flew steadily southwards the sun shone out more and more strongly, the sky from being pearly and dappled became a clear deep blue, and a gorgeous summer's day unfurled its beauty before them. Imogen was stimulated and revived by the gradual crescendo of the day's glory, and by Richard's joyous exclamations as he darted from one window to the other, excited by the marvels to be seen on either side. Presently he sat down and began to do various complicated evolutions, which Luke had taught him, with a piece of string; and Imogen, idly watching him make patterns, remembered how, on that far-off night when Johnnie had first told her that he loved her, life had seemed to her like a beautiful pattern, rich in colour and noble in design. It had not turned out quite like that, as she reflected bitterly; but still there was a connection between the various people and events of her life which could well be represented by

an intricately woven pattern, and it amused Imogen to follow out the metaphor. Across the whole design of her life went one strand which she particularly disliked—a strand which quite plainly and horribly represented the influence of wealth; and she could not help feeling that this strand probably originated in Mrs. Armitage, who did not otherwise seem to be represented in the web. There were strands for Johnnie, for herself, for Brearley, Harriet, Luke, and Mrs. Thornton; there was a deep, dark, tragic-coloured strand for Miriam Hoad, and a lighter one—which simply wandered inconsequently across one corner of the pattern, doing incalculable harm and then taking itself light-hearted out of the web again—for Ivy. At the thought of Ivy resentment rose in Imogen's heart; she had done good to Ivy, and evil had been returned to her; it was not fair. Why should the design be so arranged that a turn of the strands which brought good to one was evil to another?

She remembered then that Miriam, too, had had her theory of life as a web, but according to Miriam those concerned in the web ought not to blame each other for the misery they caused, nor ought they to blame the spinner of the web, for he wrought unconsciously, without intention—"like a knitter drowsed," as the greatest of Miriam's poets so memorably said.

Now that Miriam was dead and gone Imogen began to feel that she had under-valued both her and her philosophy —she was ashamed to remember that she had laughed at Miriam's views and thought them naïve and simple. Miriam alone, out of all the persons concerned in the web, had had a mind large enough to reach out to this poetic conception of the Spinner, to renounce her grudge against him because she believed he worked unconsciously, but to determine nevertheless that his patterns must be changed: mankind

must teach him designs which should be rich and noble. There was something infinitely pathetic, infinitely courageous, about Miriam's small, weak, untutored figure, thus defying Fate, thus attempting to bring the huge Spinner of the Years under human will and ordinance. Miriam had died obscurely in a back street, and her notes, for what they were worth, had perished; but perhaps her proud courage, her generous love, her aspiring mind, might live on and help to form out of the unfeeling void that compassionate, just, and omniscient Spinner, the creation of whom had been her life's dream.

By this time the heat of the day had become a burden, and Richard was tired of his string. He yawned, fidgeted, threw his limbs about, kicked his heels against the seat, and at last said wistfully in his heavy tones, "I wish we were at home, Mother."

Hitherto this reference to High Roebuck had always given Imogen an angry pang, but now she smiled, and drew her poor little son—sole result, for her, of her life's design—lovingly to her. The child's head fell heavily on her breast, and he yawned again; she stroked his hair and spoke soothingly to him, and presently he slept.